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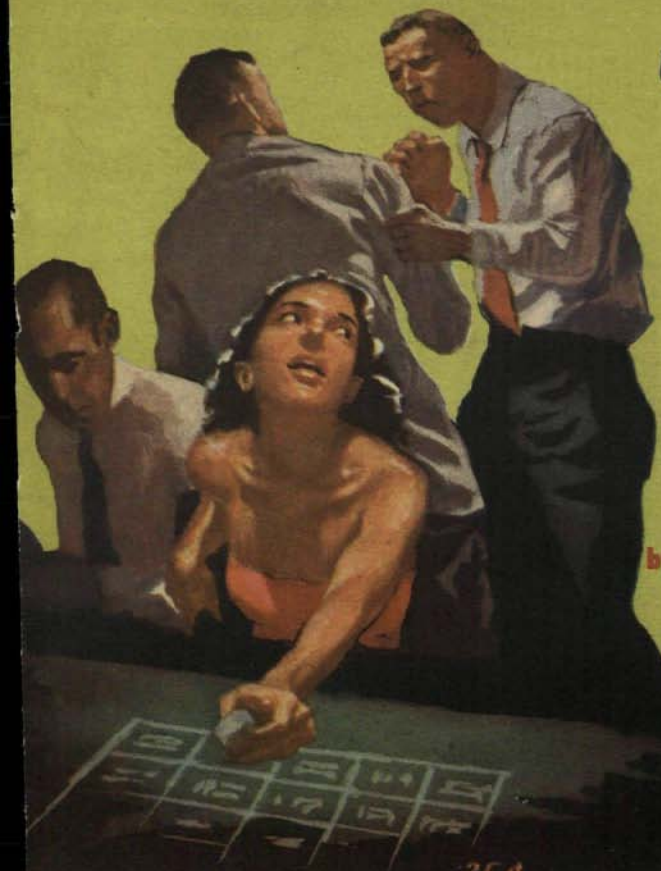
BOOK-MAGAZINE

a new novel

FALCON CITY FRAME-UP

by FRANK GRUBER



The Murdered Magdalen by CRAIG RICE

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Mercury Mystery
BOOK-MAGAZINE

A NEW ORIGINAL MYSTERY NOVEL

Falcon City Frame-up — *Frank Gruber* — 3

The jolting tale of a man who ran from death; then discovered in his small-town sanctuary a gang of hoods as terrifying as those he'd run from—and as dangerous...

Mystery Puzzle: Murder on the Lake — *J. A. Kripper* — 96

The Fabulous Drake Swindle — *W. T. Brannon* — 97

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Next month Mercury Mystery BOOK-MAGAZINE

will feature RED SCARF, an original mystery novel by Gil Brewer. It's the terrifying tale of Roy Nichols, whose desperate desire for a briefcase full of money betrayed him into a dangerous affair with a beautiful woman, then forced him to pit his courage against a sadistic gunman who had sworn to kill him.

Rounding out the issue there is a fine selection of shorter pieces, including W. T. Brannon's documentation of the weirdest deaths in history: the unsolved cases of people who purportedly died of "spontaneous human combustion"; the tale of a strange religious cult whose "missionary" service trained girls for flaming careers on the White Slave Market; plus other unique, top-level stories — both fact and fiction.

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If you like your mysteries spiced with action; taut with the realism of little people caught in big situations; and packed with entertainment, then you are probably one of Frank Gruber's many fans. As prolific a writer as he is an exciting one, Mr. Gruber has to his credit 37 books (including 25 mysteries), several hundred short stories, 51 movie scenarios, and many radio and television scripts. The reasons for Mr. Gruber's phenomenal success are nowhere more apparent than in this new, original novel, FALCON CITY FRAME-UP. *It's the jolting tale of Joe Springer, who tried to hide from death in a genial, peaceful-seeming town; then found behind the city's whitewashed façade a gang of killers as terrifying as the hoods he'd run away from — and as dangerous . . .*

FALCON CITY FRAME-UP

by Frank Gruber

CHAPTER ONE

YOU'VE SEEN THEM in New York. They hang around Times Square. Along about four in the afternoon there'll be a hundred of them on Broadway and 47th. Sharp dressers, trousers always creased, flashy ties if they're wearing ties or gaudy Hawaiian shirts if that's what they're wearing. In winter, tailored overcoats.

They're The Boys.

They eat, drink, they sleep. They're people.

"*Gotta match, Mister? Thanks, thanks a million. . . . Stranger in town, huh? Like a little action? There's a floating crap game over at the hotel. . . . Say! See that fellow over there, man with the diamond horseshoe in his tie? He's the biggest betting commissioner in New York. Did him a favor once and he just gave me a tip on a horse that the syndicate's been holding back. Name's Rolled Oats, goes in the third tomorrow at Belmont. When you make your bet, put a tenner on for me. Thanks, Mister, thanks!*"

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Joe Springer, Class of '40, Webster Groves High School. Suburb of St. Louis. Voted "The Most Likely To Succeed." Yes, Joe, you were sharp even then. Most popular man in your class, voted the most likely to succeed. What they didn't know was that you could deal them off the bottom when you were only a freshman. And they didn't know that you could run the scale with the African golf cubes when you were still a sophomore. Too bad your folks couldn't afford to send you to college. You'd have really showed them something.

. . . Hick town, St. Looie. No action there.

Chicago.

Can't hold a job.

Back to St. Looie.

Can't hold a job. No damn good. Always watching the clock, reading The Racing Form.

The Big Town. Broadway.

Can't seem to get started.

A check from home.

Fiver in the mail.

A buck at Christmas.

The hell with them.

So here's Joe Springer, now. Thirty-three.

Walking down 49th, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue at Three-thirty in the A.M. There's a buck seventy-five in the old kicker. The Subway tonight — tomorrow'll be another day.

The black Cadillac screeched to a stop and the stiff was shoved out. By Big Jake, who'd slipped Joe the twenty the time he'd steered the Milwaukee brassiere and girdle man to Big Jake's game.

Damn it, damn it to hell!

Joe ran. Ran back toward the lights of Broadway. The Cadillac was on a one-way street, going west. Big Jake couldn't follow Joe and he was safe. For now.

The papers had it in the morning.

Lou Rosen, dumped on 49th Street. Two bullets in him.

Schneider, the all-night delicatessen man, described the car. Big black sedan, Buick or Lincoln. Maybe a Dodge. Couldn't see the license number. The man in the car . . . light wasn't good.

But there was another witness, fellow who ran away. Seen him around. Don't know his name for sure. Joe something or other. Hangs around Times Square.

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From Wendell Wilson's Column
in the *Clarion:*
To Lease. Two square feet of sidewalk. Location, SW Corner Broadway & 47th. Formerly occupied by Joe Springer, who has departed for parts unknown. Apply BJM, % Big Jake Moriarty.

CHAPTER TWO

ALL RIGHT, JOE SPRINGER. *Here's a brand-new pack of cards, a fresh deal. Take a look at your hand. Yeah, it's from hunger. But it's the only hand you've got. Let's see how you play it!*

The sign said: *Falcon City, Population 6912.*

Joe Springer looked at the sign and the weariness of a thousand miles seeped through his bones. He said, aloud: "Population, 6913."

He started down the highway, which became the main street of Falcon City a few hundred yards away. A truck rumbled past him. A car came whipping along, slackened speed. As it passed him it idled down so it scarcely moved faster than Joe.

A green Ford. Lettering on it read: *Falcon City Police Department.* The man behind the wheel was in plain clothes. He looked at Joe and he looked through him.

. . . New York was a thousand miles away. A thousand miles and nine days. Nine days of tramping the county highways, the trunk lines, the state highways. Never the main roads. North, one day, south the next, north, west, south, west. Never east.

There wasn't any use going further. Falcon City was safe, or no place was safe. The hand of Big Jake Moriarty could reach to the Mojave Desert as readily as to Falcon City, if the hand knew Joe Springer was hiding there.

The police car rolled past, picked up speed. Joe Springer continued on into Falcon City. In the third business block was a three-story building. A fairly new building, with a neon sign running down the corner: *Faulkner Hotel.*

Joe stopped in front of the hotel. He fingered the two dimes and the penny in his pocket, shrugged and went into the hotel. A tall man with large teeth stood behind the desk. He nodded to Joe.

"Good morning, sir."

"I'd like a room with a bath. A fairly nice room."

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"Yes, sir, how about something at, say, three-fifty?"

"That'll be fine."

Joe picked up the desk pen, hesitated and wrote on the card: "*Joseph Webster, Oak Park, Illinois.*"

He put down the pen and threw out the feeler. It wouldn't work in New York, but it might here and if it didn't there was always the fast one.

"My luggage is being sent over."

"From the airport?"

Joe nodded.

The clerk turned, took a key out of a slot. He extended it to Joe. "Room 302. That's the corner room, on the front."

"No bellboy?"

"We have one, but he's, ah, he's not here right now. But I'll see that your bags are brought to your room when they arrive."

Room 302 was a good room, much better than Joe was accustomed to. In New York it would have cost twelve or fourteen dollars a day.

Joe tested the bed, found the mattress soft and stretched out on it.

Falcon City. Twenty-one cents. The luggage wouldn't come, of course, but if a man went for that one he'd certainly show great sympathy for the lost luggage routine. A nice display of indignation over the carelessness of the airport employees ought to do the trick. For about two days.

A groan escaped Joe's lips. He got up and went to the chifforobe and looked in the mirror. The shirt was wrinkled, positively dank from perspiration. Dirty, yes, but not too dirty. You can wear a loud sport shirt for ten days if you're careful. But that was the limit. He could wash it himself but he couldn't iron it. Or could he in a hotel like this? He took the razor from his pocket. Thirty-nine cents of his dollar seventy-five had gone for it.

He undressed, took a luxurious bath and shaved, using hotel soap instead of shaving cream. He dressed again.

He hadn't eaten since mid-afternoon of the day before. Twenty-one cents wouldn't buy very much food.

He descended to the lobby and was about to approach the desk when he recognized the man examining the last registration card. The Falcon City bull.

He was a big man, an inch or so over six feet. He weighed about two hundred pounds and none of it was fat. He turned and saw Joe.

"Hello."

Joe said, "Hello," and continued on to the door. The detective didn't follow and Joe went out and began to breathe again.

Across the street was the Swedish Kitchen. Joe went over and entered. The place had eight or ten tables and a U-shaped counter. A man in the

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denim uniform of a service station was at the counter. Joe sat down across from him.

A waitress came up.

"What'll it be?"

"Cup of coffee."

"How about a piece of pie — or some doughnuts?"

Joe looked at the girl. She was young and blonde. Quite pretty.

He said, evenly: "Baby, I've got twenty-one cents in my pocket. If I had ten dollars I'd have a steak and ask you for a date tonight. But since I haven't got the ten — I'll have coffee. Just coffee."

She drew a cup of coffee. While Joe was putting sugar into it she set down a plate with two doughnuts.

"That's five cents."

Joe put a dime on the counter, ate the doughnuts and drank his coffee. Then he pocketed the nickel change.

"I'll be back," he said. "Meanwhile — thanks for the handout."

"My name's Nell," the girl volunteered.

Joe looked at her. Then he nodded slowly. "I'll remember — Nell."

He went out. Next door to the Swedish Kitchen was Lockey's Furniture Store. A young salesman came forward as Joe entered.

"Yes, sir, can I show you something?"

"I'd like to see the boss."

"Mr. Lockey's back in the office."

Joe went to the rear of the store. Mr. Lockey was fat and bald. He was working at a fat ledger.

"I'm looking for a job, Mr. Lockey."

Lockey grunted. "Doing what?"

"Anything. Moving furniture, delivering — salesman . . ."

The furniture man shook his head. "Sorry. Business is bad. I haven't got a thing."

Joe nodded. "S'all right."

CHAPTER THREE

Next door to Lockey's Furniture was a building with a modernistic front. Lettering on the big window said: *FALCON CITY TIMES.*

Joe entered. The front office of the Falcon City *Times* was a large room. Two women were working at desks behind a railing. Joe said to the first:

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"I'd like to see the boss."

"Mr. Wagoner?"

"He's the boss?"

"He's the publisher — the owner." The girl rose. "I'll see if he's in."

She went into a private office. After a moment she returned. "What did you want to see Mr. Wagoner about?"

"A private matter. Important."

She hesitated, then re-entered the publisher's office. After a moment she returned. "Mr. Wagoner will see you."

Carl Wagoner was about fifty, a sharp-eyed man with a sardonic expression. He indicated a chair but made no move to get up or shake hands. "The girl didn't get your name."

"It's Joe Webster."

"You told her your business was very important."

"It is — to me. I'm looking for a job."

A grin almost twisted Wagoner's lips. "What kind of a job?"

"I'm not particular. I'll do anything."

"Are you a linotype operator?"

"No."

"Reporter?"

Joe shook his head. "I've never tried it, but I'm willing. I'll also sweep the floor and run errands. Or sell newspapers."

"Ever see the Falcon City *Times*?"

"No, sir."

Wagoner picked up a thin newspaper. "This is it. A lousy sheet. No circulation, no advertising."

"None at all?"

"Practically none. I bought the sheet four months ago. Pig in a poke — and the poke stinks. I made my quarterly payment last month and I've got two months to the next. Then I fold." He shrugged. "I've got junk in the back shop. A lousy editor and a drunk for an advertising manager. If I had any sense I'd close the door right now and go back to Chicago."

Joe shrugged. "I've lived in Chicago."

"Where else?"

"A few places."

"Like that, eh?"

"I haven't got any references."

"The fellow who sold me this rag had references. All kinds of references. A vestryman in his church, too. He skinned me." Wagoner got up suddenly. "You're broke?"

"No," said Joe. "Not by sixteen cents I'm not broke."

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Wagoner pulled out a fistful of crumpled bills, sorted out a single and dropped it on his desk.

"Get yourself a square meal."

Joe crossed and picked up the dollar. "I'm not hungry enough to be insulted. Just hungry enough to take this." He half saluted Wagoner. "Thanks, Mister."

He started to leave.

"Wait."

Joe turned.

Wagoner shook his head. "Think you could sell advertising?"

"That's the one thing I *can* do — sell. I've been selling all my life."

"What?" Then the publisher waved impatiently. "Never mind. I'll give you a week's try. Forty dollars. Make good and you've got a steady job — for two months."

Joe drew a deep breath. "I'll give it my best."

Wagoner picked up a large pink card. "You can't teach anyone to sell advertising. Either they've got it or they haven't. All you've got to know is on this card. It says we've got 5500 circulation. That's a lie. We're printing only 3100 copies a day. Our advertising rate is seventy cents an inch. We take fifty — and even forty if we can get it. All right, you've got a job for a week. You knew how to get in to see me. Do your stuff."

Joe took the rate card, then picked up a copy of the Falcon City *Times*. "Can I have this?"

Wagoner shrugged. "That's the only thing we've got plenty of around here — newspapers."

Joe left the private office of the publisher, nodded to the girls in the outer room and left the building.

He looked at Lockey's Furniture Store next door, drew a deep breath and entered.

The young clerk again came forward but Joe nodded toward the office at the rear.

Lockey looked up from his fat ledger as Joe entered. "Back already? I still haven't got a job for you."

"I've got one."

Lockey frowned. "Since you were here?"

"Yep! Right next door — the Falcon City *Times*."

"Wagoner hired you? Didn't think he could afford to hire anyone."

"Where'd you get that idea?"

"All around town. They say he's broke."

"They say wrong, Mister. I'm working for the *Times* now."

"Doing what?"

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"Selling advertising."

"I haven't run an ad in the *Times* in six months. Business is bad. I told you."

"It's bad because you're not advertising."

Lockey bristled. "Now, wait a minute, don't you start telling me how to run my business. Ten minutes ago you were here asking *me* for a job."

"That's right — but I *sold* myself next door. Now I want to sell *you* an ad."

"Well, you're not going to."

"Mr. Lockey," Joe said earnestly, "I'm not going to sell you anything. If you want to *buy* advertising that's another matter."

"How can I reach anyone through your rag? You haven't got any circulation."

"One thing we've got, Mr. Lockey, *is* circulation. We may not have much advertising but I assure you one thing we *have* got is circulation."

"How much?"

Joe grimaced and stole a look at the pink rate card.

Lockey exclaimed triumphantly. "See — you don't even know. Bet you don't even know your advertising rate. Quick, how much would a full-page ad cost me?"

Joe shot back, "You name it!"

"Fifty dollars!"

"Make it sixty."

Lockey suddenly cleared his throat. "Now, wait a minute. Who started this?"

"You did, Mr. Lockey."

Lockey stared at Joe. Then he drummed his fingers on the desk. "Why not? Maybe a flier'd bring some people into the damn place. Sixty dollars, eh?" He drew a deep breath. "I've got some mats here on some living room suites. Here, take them. Make me up a full page ad. Two-piece living room suites. $149.00 up. Run it tomorrow."

Joe took the newspaper mats. He had only a vague idea as to their purpose. "A full page ad — tomorrow. Very good, Mr. Lockey."

Lockey suddenly grinned. "Maybe I should have hired you at that."

"Maybe you should."

Joe left the store quickly. Outside, he pulled the rate card from his pocket and scanned it. After a moment or two he deduced that the *Times* was an eight-column paper of twenty inches per column. So a full-page ad was a hundred and sixty inches. Sixty dollars for a hundred and sixty inches was somewhat below the forty cents Wagoner had jibed about — but not too much below the figure.

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Across the street was a dry goods store. Joe went over, found an elderly man unpacking blankets from a huge carton.

"Just get in a new shipment of blankets?" Joe asked cheerfully.

The dry goods man nodded. "I'm having a sale on Friday."

"That's good," Joe said enthusiastically. "Then you ought to advertise it in the *Times*."

"I've got plenty of blankets, all right. As a matter of fact I thought I *might* run a little announcement."

"A little announcement? A page ad, sir. Made a big splash. Let people *know* you're having a *big* sale."

The dry goods man frowned. "You work for the *Times*?"

"New advertising salesman."

"Thought Harwood was the advertising man."

"He is — I'm just an assistant. But I can take your ad."

"A full page is too much. Uh, how much would a half page cost me?"

"Forty dollars."

CHAPTER FOUR

SHORTLY AFTER TWO-THIRTY Joe entered the offices of the *Times*. Wagoner was in the outer office building talking to one of the bookkeepers.

He glanced at the mats in Joe's hand. His eyes narrowed. "Where'd you get those?"

"They're to go with some ads."

Wagoner walked away from the bookkeeper. "You got an ad?"

"Of course."

"From who?"

"Well, let's see, Lockey's, next door."

"You sold Lockey an ad?"

"A page. Then —"

Wagoner caught Joe's arm. "You sold Lockey a *full-page* ad?"

Joe winced. "He was my first customer and I was green. I'm afraid I sold it too cheap — sixty dollars for a full page."

"That's sixty dollars more than we ever got out of Lockey. Go ahead, who else did you sell?"

"A half page to the Dry Goods Store across the street — forty dollars from him."

Wagoner stared at Joe. "A page and a half. Go ahead — any more?"

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"Well, not any big stuff. Just a half page to the hardware store and three-four small ads. Let's see — twelve inches to the haberdashery. Twenty inches to the lumber yard and one more — oh, here it is, twelve inches to the radio and television store. That's all."

"That's all, eh?"

"Yes, I was just getting started but I thought I'd better check back and —"

"Wait a minute," Wagoner strode to a door and pulled it open.

"Harwood! Jennings — come out here."

Two men came through the door. Both were in their thirties but there the resemblance ended. One was heavy-set, almost bald. He wore thick-lensed rimless glasses.

The other man was lean and lanky. His face was screwed up into a perpetual sneer. In a few years more he'd have stomach trouble.

"Harwood," Wagoner said. "This is Joe Webster. A new man I'm putting on advertising."

A scowl flitted across the lean man's face. "There's hardly enough business in Falcon City for another advertising man."

"There's enough. Joe's been out on the street two hours and he sold three hundred and sixty-four inches of advertising, including a full page to Lockey's next door."

Harwood stared at Joe. "A full page to Lockey's!"

"That's an account we've never had since I've been here."

CHAPTER FIVE

NELL WOODSON CAME OUT of the Swedish Kitchen as Joe Webster crossed the street.

"Remember me?" Joe asked.

"Why, yes. You were in the restaurant this morning."

"I've got the tenner. Well, where do we go?"

She hesitated. "I didn't say I'd go anywhere with you. I don't know you."

"My name's Webster. Joe Webster. Yours is Nell — Nell what?"

"Nell Woodson."

"Okay, I've got a job. I'm working for the Falcon City *Times*. I'm the new advertising salesman. And it turns out I'm terrific. I got an advance on my pay and I'm going to let you show me the town."

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"Well, you *are* living here now," Nell conceded. "And the newspaper's pretty important —"

"Let's go, Baby."

"Have you got a car?"

"Not yet. I only hit town this morning."

"I've got a Chevvy parked around the corner. It's not much of a car."

"If it's got wheels and a horn I can drive it."

It also had a motor, but not much else. However, it got them out to The Twilight Club, overlooking Falcon Lake, two miles out of town. There was a ballroom upstairs, bar and dining room on the first floor and a bowling alley downstairs. There was also a back room behind the bowling alley but Joe didn't know about that yet. Only the police and the customers knew about that room.

They got a booth and ordered dinner.

Nell planted her elbows on the table and looked at Joe. "All right, tell me about yourself."

"I already did. I'm working for the Falcon City *Times*."

"But what did you do before you came here?"

"Lots of things. Look — where'd *you* come from?"

"A farm upstate. I've only been in Falcon City a year."

"How come you're still free?"

"What do you mean, free?"

"Somebody hasn't grabbed you off — married you?"

"I'm in no hurry. I'm only twenty." She hesitated. "There *is* a fellow."

"Of course there is. There always is. What does he do?"

"He's a policeman!"

"A cop!" exclaimed Joe.

"That bothers you? It shouldn't. Not as long as you don't drive a car. I guess he'd give *me* a ticket if I parked too long on Main Street."

"That's all he does, give out parking tickets?"

"As far as I know. Mickey doesn't like to talk about his work. His name's Mike — Mike Carver, but he likes Mickey better."

"How come you're not out with Mike — Mickey tonight?"

"He's working. He's on from four to twelve. I see him Sundays." She paused briefly. "Once in a while when he's through working."

"You live alone?"

"I've got a little apartment. I used to share it with a girl, but she got a job in Grand Rapids."

The waiter brought tomato juice, *hors d'oeuvres*, a steak knife for Joe. As he was leaving, a man in his late forties, a slightly stooping man, came up.

"Everything all right?"

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"It's fine, Mr. Harrison," Nell said.

"That's good. Dancing's about to start upstairs. Got a good orchestra this week."

"We'll dance," Joe said, "after we eat."

Harrison looked at Joe thoughtfully. "Don't believe I've seen you around before."

"First time I've been here."

"Hope you have a good time, so you'll come back."

"Oh, I'll be back. All the time. I work for the Falcon City *Times*. Which reminds me, you've got quite a layout here. How come you're not carrying an ad with us?"

Harrison's eyes narrowed, then he shrugged and sat down facing Joe. "As a matter of fact I've been thinking of doing a little advertising. Been getting in some pretty good bands and they run into money. Could use more customers out here. Suppose you made me up a little ad — how much would it cost me?"

"Every day?"

"No — no, we don't do much business here the early part of the week. Say, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. About two columns by three or four inches."

"Let's say eight inches, at seventy cents an inch. That's $5.60 a day. Why don't we say an even five dollars a day?"

"Fifteen a week. That's all right. Fix up a good ad. Look the place over. Play up the dancing, but put in something about the food and the — well, better just say refreshments. Some people don't like the mention of beer or liquor in an ad. Me, I don't drink," said Harrison. "Just once in a while. Fix up that ad and run it this week."

He went off and Joe gave his attention to Nell. She was watching him closely. "So *that's* what you do for a living?"

"That's it. And it's a living, that's all."

"I think it's wonderful," Nell said warmly. Her eyes were shining as she regarded Joe.

Joe ate with gusto, while Nell toyed with her salad. Joe finished with dessert, drank his coffee and lit a cigarette, from a freshly purchased pack.

"Not bad," he said. "Not bad at all."

He leaned back and suddenly felt depressed. The Falcon City detective who was the first Falconite Joe had seen that day, was approaching the table. His eyes were on Nell.

"Hello, Nell," he said.

"Chief!" exclaimed Nell. She winced and her face crimsoned. "Uh, like you to meet my friend —"

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"Joe Webster's the name." Joe cocked his head to one side. "Chief?"

The policeman nodded carelessly. "Latimer. Saw you at the hotel today, didn't I?"

"I'm staying there."

"Mr. Webster works for the paper," interposed Nell.

"So I've heard." Chief Latimer pursed his lips. "Guess I ought to put Mike on the day shift for awhile." He shifted to Joe. "Tough for a man to work nights when his girl works days. Tough for both of them."

"Guess it is," agreed Joe. He looked inquiringly at Nell. "Ready to go now?"

She pushed back her chair, rose to her feet. Joe picked up the check.

"Nice meeting you, Chief."

"Be seeing you around."

Chief Latimer watched them go.

As they left the building Joe said to Nell: "He'll blab to the boy friend?"

"He won't have to," Nell said. She nodded ahead. "They work together. There's Mickey."

Crouched over the front bumper of Nell's car, elbow on raised knee, was a beefy man of about thirty. Straightened, he probably stood only five eight, but he weighed a good two-twenty. He was built like a wrestler — a wrestler in good shape.

He half saluted as Nell and Joe came up.

"Hi, folks."

"This is Joe Webster," Nell said. "He works for the newspaper. I — I was coming out here for dinner and he — he came along."

"Sure," said Mickey. "Why not?" He held out his hand to Joe. "Howya?"

Joe nodded briefly. He took Mickey's hand. The hand was beefy, but the handshake was limp, clammy.

Joe wiped the moisture from his hand onto his trousers. "Well, guess I'll start hoofing it back to town."

"She brought you," said Mickey. "She can take you back."

"I — I can drop you in town," Nell said nervously. She got in behind the wheel. Joe walked around to the other side and got in.

Mickey smiled widely, half saluted Joe. "Nice meeting you, Mr. Webster." He stepped aside as Nell started the car.

Nell made a U-turn and Joe, glancing through the rear vision mirror, saw Mickey looking after them. "Sorry," he said.

"About what?"

"Mickey. He's sore."

Nell suddenly flared up. "He's always sore. He doesn't like the job I've got. He doesn't like the place I live in. He doesn't like the people I know.

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He — he doesn't like anything about me."

"He likes you."

"He likes what I give him." The involuntary remark caused her to wince. But Joe, shooting a sideward glance at her, saw her nostrils flare, her chin set. "All right, I said it," she went on, grimly. "He likes what I give him. It's cheap — practically free. But I'm fed up with it. And I'm fed up with Mickey. Just because he's a cop, he thinks . . ."

She didn't finish the sentence. Joe leaned back against the cushion, watched the road ahead. Nell didn't say another word until she parked the car in front of a paintless, two-story frame house on a side street about two blocks from the hotel where Joe was registered.

"Here's where I live."

Joe got out, started to go around the car to help her out, but she climbed out and met him halfway.

"Thanks," said Joe. "Thanks for going out with me."

She nodded. "Aren't you coming in?" He shook his head and she added, "I've got my own entrance, on the side. The landlady won't know."

"It was nice," Joe said. "Thanks."

She flared up again. "You heard what I said, didn't you? About what I've been giving Mickey . . ."

"I heard."

"Well?"

"You're mad at him — now. You won't be tomorrow. Then you'd be mad at me."

"I'm mad, all right. And I'm going to stay mad. I'm through with him."

"When you *are* through with him, I mean really through . . ."

Nell turned away from him and ran into the house.

CHAPTER SIX

At ten minutes after twelve, Joe entered the office of the Falcon City *Times*. Harwood and Jennings were both in the outer office.

Joe walked to a desk and laid out the mats and advertising copy.

"How much?" Harwood asked thinly.

"I haven't stopped to figure it out," Joe said. "Not too much. Around two pages."

"Around two pages?" sneered the advertising manager. "That's all?"

"A genius," said Jennings.

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"The original high-pressure boy," Harwood added sourly.

Joe said evenly: "I was hired to sell advertising. Mr. Wagoner's paying me for a job and that's what I'm doing."

"Right," said Wagoner from the door of his office. "Come in, Joe. I want to talk to you." He nodded to the others. "You two wait a minute."

Joe followed the publisher into his office. Wagoner stood by the door and as Joe entered, he closed it. "Let them strain their ears."

He turned. "So yesterday wasn't just a flash in the pan?"

"I'm a salesman," Joe said. "I've been a salesman all my life."

"That's what you said. All right, I'm convinced. I've been doing a lot of thinking since yesterday. Thinking about you, Joe. Well, it was just contingent thinking — contingent upon your not being that flash in the pan I just mentioned. I'm convinced now." He crossed to his desk, seated himself and looked across at Joe.

"I can make it. There wasn't anything wrong with this paper. There's nothing wrong with this town. *You* proved that. You've sold, since yesterday, over five pages of advertising. *Two* pages a day — two pages a day, every day will make a well paper out of a sick one. Ten pages a week, averaging fifty dollars a page will make this paper a money-maker. We can spend money on circulation — build it up. We'll put out a thousand copies a day more. We'll put them in every possible place in town and we'll cover the crossroads out in the county. When you've got enough advertising to pay your way you can get the circulation. All right, not to keep those two waiting past their lunch time, let's get down to business. You're the new advertising manger of the *Times*. Your pay's seventy-five a week — and if you've got that page average at the end of the month, your salary'll be a hundred a week."

"Harwood isn't going to like it."

"Neither is Jennings," snapped Wagoner. "But I just told you, you're the boss — fire Harwood, if you want to. Here . . ."

Wagoner got up and strode to the door. He pulled it open and called out, "Harwood! Jennings!"

The editor and advertising manager — former advertising manager — came into the office promptly.

"This is going to hurt," Wagoner said grimly. "Especially you, Harwood. I've just made Joe Webster advertising manager of the *Times*."

Harwood flinched. "You mean I'm through?"

"No," Joe said quickly. "Stay on. I — I need help."

Harwood pulled himself together. "Mr. Wagoner, I want to register a protest. I've worked for you ever since you've owned this paper. I don't think it's fair to take a new man and promote him over . . ."

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"Fire him, Joe," said Wagoner.

Harwood stopped. Joe regarded him thoughtfully. "You want to stay on?"

"I need the job," said Harwood. "I'm a married man. I don't think it's . . ." He capitulated abruptly. "Yes, I — I'd like to stay on."

"All right." Wagoner turned to the editor. "What about you, Jennings?"

Jennings had learned his lesson from Harwood. "Why, I don't think this affects me."

"It'll affect you if you don't play ball with Webster. You, too, Harwood. Joe's boss of the advertising department from now on. You'll cooperate with him. Both of you. We're going to get out a newspaper here. A good paper. We can't get out a good paper with office feuds. You're the editor, Jennings. Joe's the advertising manager. Harwood, you'll work under Joe. That's all, now."

In the outer office, Harwood and Jennings looked at Joe, looked at each other, then looked back at Joe.

Harwood cleared his throat. "Thanks, I really need the job. I haven't got twenty dollars in the bank."

"Neither have I," said Joe.

"You're a natural ad man," said Jennings over-enthusiastically. "Well, Harry, shall we grab a bite?"

Harwood jumped at the cue. "Sure, Clem. Let's go eat."

The two headed for the door. Before they reached it, the door swung open and a girl walked in. Harwood was on the verge of coming back but Jennings went out and Harwood followed.

The girl came up to Joe.

"Hello," she said. "I'm Pat Bryce."

She was the most beautiful girl Joe had ever seen and he'd seen them all on Broadway — tarts, streetwalkers, models, actresses going into the theatres. This girl had what all the others had — the best of them. She had it in spades.

He said, "How are you, Miss Bryce? Can I do something for you?"

"That's why I'm here. About seven years ago the *Times* ran a picture of me, wearing a black gown and mortar-board when I graduated from high school. My sorority's asked me for a high school picture and that's the only one I recall having had taken in high school. I thought there might be an off-chance that your paper saved old pictures."

"I'll find out for you." Joe turned away but one of the bookkeepers was already coming forward.

"Hello, Pat, didn't know you were back in Falcon City."

"Oh, hello, Ginny — I didn't see you. Yes, I got back two days ago.

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We'll have to get together for a session."

"Sure, Pat," said Ginny. "I work here. Call me — if you get time."

"I'll do that."

Ginny nodded. "We keep a file of pictures. It's down in the basement. I'll go down . . ."

"Oh, don't bother going down now. Any time. I'll stop in tomorrow."

She started to turn away, saw Joe again. Ginny hastened to make an introduction.

"Pat, this is Mr. Webster, our new advertising manager. Mr. Webster, Pat Bryce."

"How are you, Miss Bryce?"

She nodded coolly, "It's a pleasure," and went out.

Ginny said: "The daughter of our leading citizen, our congressman."

"Nice. Yeah — very nice."

Ginny went on. "We graduated from high school together. She went on to Smith. I started to work here. She takes trips to Europe. I take trips to Falcon Lake."

"Falcon Lake's a very nice lake."

CHAPTER SEVEN

JOE ENTERED THE OFFICE of the *Times* and Ginny signaled to him.

"A girl was in to see you, Mr. Webster."

"Did she leave a message?"

"Yes. It was Nellie, the waitress at the Swedish Kitchen. She — she said she wants to talk to you."

Joe hesitated. He hadn't seen Nell Woodson since that first night in Falcon City three weeks ago. He was eating his meals in the hotel dining room now. But he remembered the matter of some doughnuts.

He put his mats down on his desk and said to Ginny, "I'm going out to get some coffee."

A half dozen men were at the counter of the Swedish Kitchen, but Nell came over immediately.

"Haven't seen you lately," she said.

"Been pretty busy learning the new job."

"I've been reading your paper. It's a lot different lately. Seems much bigger."

"That's what I've been doing — making the paper bigger. Used to be six

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pages all the time. Now it's ten — twelve, and we had a sixteen page issue last Thursday."

"That's good — real good."

Nell turned away, drew a cup of coffee and set it down before Joe. Then, as an afterthought, she got two doughnuts.

Joe grinned. "Thanks. Thanks, Baby."

"Could I see you tonight?" There was a note of anxiety in her tone.

Joe hesitated and Nell leaned forward. "It's — it's important. Something I've got to tell you."

"Still quit at eight?"

"Yes, but don't meet me here. I'll pick you up."

"Where?"

"A block from your hotel. Oak and Milton. About five minutes after eight. Be there." She paused. "Please."

Dusk was falling over Falcon City when Joe strolled from the hotel down the tree-lined street.

He reached the corner of Oak and Milton and stopped. A car, headlights dimmed, swung from Main Street and pulled to the curb. Nell leaned across and swung open the door for him.

"Hurry!"

Joe got in and Nell roared the car away in second gear.

"What's the hush-hush stuff?" he asked.

She did not reply. Joe shrugged and leaned back. Nell drove out of Falcon City as fast as the old car could travel. At the first intersection past the city limits, she swung onto a gravelled road. She crested a low knoll, pulled off the road and braked the car to a screeching stop.

She shut off the ignition and turning, grabbed Joe. He was startled by the fierceness of her embrace, the passion with which she kissed him. Her mouth crushed against his. For weeks other instincts had been dominant in Joe, but this . . . well, she'd said it herself. She gave it — practically free.

Ten minutes later they sat up. Joe took out a crumpled package of cigarettes, handed it to Nell. They lit up.

She took a long drag on the cigarette and exhaled heavily.

"That — that wasn't why I wanted to see you. I mean — well, I *did* want to see you for that, but it wasn't the main reason . . ."

"Mickey?"

She exclaimed. "I'm through with him. It's all over. Yes, he's been after me. All week. Only I haven't let him in. It — it isn't Mickey. It's the Swedish Kitchen . . ."

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"What's happening?"

"Mrs. Jorgenson owns the Swedish Kitchen," Nell said. "She acts tough. I guess she thinks she's got to act tough to handle the kind of people we have at the restaurant. But she isn't tough at all. She's nice and she's been awfully good to me. I like her and I want to help her, so when these men came in yesterday . . ."

She stopped. In the darkness Joe could not see her face, but he knew that she was agitated. He prodded, "What men?"

"The men about the — the horse bets."

"Jeez!" exclaimed Joe softly. "Here in the sticks?"

"Mrs. Jorgenson has been taking a few bets. Fifty cents and a dollar. She — she's always turned them over to Paddy Martin."

"How dumb can I be?" Joe asked. "Paddy Martin, the barber. Sure — the place looks just like it. Barber shop, cigar counter — couple of pool tables. I've had my head in a bag. Just didn't think of bookies here." He shook his head. "Don't tell me now — *you* play the horses?"

"Just once in a while. A dollar maybe."

Joe exhaled. "All right. Mrs. Jorgenson takes horse bets. She lays it off with Paddy Martin. So now some men come to see Mrs. Jorgenson. I smell a mouse — a big rat, I should say, but go ahead, give it to me. About these men — two, eh?"

"That's right. You know 'em?"

"No. But there are always two men."

"They — they got rough with Mrs. Jorgenson. Uh, threatened her —"

"Because she took horse bets?"

"No — no, you don't understand. They want *her* to turn the bets over to them."

"Sure. They're taking over. These chappies — they work *with* Paddy Martin?"

"I don't know. Mrs. Jorgenson talked to Paddy and he — well, he acted funny. Pretended he didn't know what she was talking about. Said he ran a barber shop, that was all. Yet everyone knows that Mrs. Jorgenson was turning those bets over to Paddy . . ."

"Everyone?" asked Joe. "Everyone knew? The cops?"

"What you mean is, did Mickey know? Mickey's a policeman. What harm was Mrs. Jorgenson doing? She didn't *make* people bet."

"Nobody makes people bet. Nobody except the people themselves. All right. The law knows. Question, does the law know about the hoods taking over?"

"Oh, no. You're the only one who knows. They — they said something would happen to Mrs. Jorgenson if she told anyone. She hasn't said —"

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"Only to you."

"I was there when they came in. They said she had to double the — the amount."

"What?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. They said she had to turn over two hundred dollars a day from now on."

"Hold it, Baby. The Swedish lady was booking a hundred a day? You mentioned fifty cent bets . . ."

"Well, some of the people bet more. But then she only got to keep four or five dollars."

Nell shivered. "They — they threatened Mrs. Jorgenson. Said something awful would happen to her if she didn't do what they told her." She paused. "What would they do?"

"You've seen it in the pictures, haven't you?"

He felt her shudder. "They — they're — gangsters?"

"Business men is what they call themselves. Big business men. Yes, they get rough sometimes."

"But what can Mrs. Jorgenson do?"

"She can do one of three things. She can go to the cops. She can get her arm broken — or she can hustle up more horse bets."

Nell was silent a moment. Then she said, "I — I'm disappointed."

"In me?"

Joe reached for her. She came into his arms, returned his kiss, but the fire was gone. And her flesh was — not yielding. He released her.

"Let's get a drink somewhere."

Without hesitating she said, "Okay."

She started the car, drove a quarter of a mile ahead to a crossroad and turned. A few minutes later they came back on the pavement. Nell turned south.

Joe looked in the rear vision mirror, saw lights come on behind them.

He said: "Someone was parked back there."

For a moment she did not understand. Then she exclaimed, "Mickey! He's followed me."

"He timed how long we were parked on the side road."

"Why, the dirty louse!" cried Nell. "I'll get even with him for that if it's the last thing I do in this town." Angrily Nell stepped on the gas. The lights of the Twilight Club appeared ahead and she swung the car off the road into the parking lot. They went in and found the bar.

Pat Bryce was at the far end of the room, chatting animatedly with a tall man in his forties, a rather distinguished looking man with wavy, white hair. She did not see Joe.

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Joe and Nell climbed up on stools. "I'd like a martini," Nell said.

Joe shrugged, nodded to the bartender. "Two martinis."

"Make it two apiece," Nell said.

"All right," said Joe. "Let's get drunk."

Joe had two martinis while Nell put away four. Then he said: "Feel like dancing?"

"I don't want to dance. I'd like to go downstairs."

"There's a bowling alley downstairs."

"In front. But there's a back room, too."

Joe said: "All right, let's go see what they've got in the back room."

They had a crap table, two blackjack layouts, a roulette wheel and a dozen slot machines. And two dozen players.

"I'll be damned," said Joe when he sized it up.

"I wanna shoot craps," said Nell. The martinis were really taking hold.

"With your money or mine?"

"I'll use my money. Be a cheapskate." She opened her purse, fished out two singles and a crumpled five.

"I shoot a dollar," she cried to the croupier.

"Put it on the line, Miss," the man said. "The dice'll come around to you."

Joe took the dollar from Nell's hand and put it on the felt for "Come." He put a dollar of his own c.. "Don't Pass."

The player with the dice threw three. The croupier raked in Nell's dollar, put a pink check with Joe's dollar.

"Here we go again. Place your bets."

"I lost, didn't I?" Nell asked stupidly. She put out another dollar.

The player threw a five, then sevened out. Joe pulled in his four dollars.

"Next man," droned the stick man.

"I lost again," Nell babbled. "All right. I shoot the works — the whole five."

Joe put his four dollars on "Don't Pass."

The new man with the dice threw a ten, an eight, then a seven.

Nell's seven dollars were gone. She looked woozily at the green felt table, then suddenly pulled herself together. "'Scuse me, gotta go."

She turned and headed for a door marked, "Ladies."

Joe withdrew seven dollars, lost a dollar when the man with the dice made a pass, then won one when he failed.

The dice came to him. He put a dollar on the line. Chanel No. 5 assailed his nostrils and a manicured hand reached past and put twenty dollars beside his check.

"Hello, Mr. Webster," Pat Bryce said. "Didn't expect to see you here."

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'Don't tell my boss," Joe said. He threw out the dice. They came out seven.

"Why, Mr. Webster!" exclaimed Pat.

He shrugged. "I'll drag a dollar."

"Don't you believe in yourself?"

"In myself, yes, but not in the dice."

"Well, I believe in them. I'll let mine ride."

But the stick man reached over. "Twenty-five is the house limit, Miss Bryce."

"Oh," she said. "This is a *small* game."

She allowed three chips to be pushed back. Joe threw an eleven.

"Beginners' luck," he said. He pulled back another dollar.

"I believe you *are* a beginner, Mr. Webster. By the way, have you met Mr. Kinsella?"

The distinguished-looking man with Pat nodded coolly. "How are you, Mr. Webster?"

"How are you, Mr. Kinsella?" Joe nodded thoughtfully. "The bank, eh?"

Kinsella flashed a smile. "A little pleasure, once in a while."

Joe made five passes with the dice, then sevened out. He passed the dice to Pat. She threw a six and followed with a seven. Joe looked toward the door of the ladies' room. Pat caught his look.

"What happened to the pretty blonde?"

Joe indicated the washroom. "She had four martinis."

"Oh, like that."

"She had them fast. She's not used to it."

"Who is?"

Pat threw out twenty dollars on Kinsella's roll. Joe put a dollar on "Don't Pass."

Pat looked at him sharply. "You're betting against the dice?"

"I'm betting percentages."

"But you made five passes yourself."

"Sure, once. I won't make five passes again all evening."

Kinsella lost his modest five dollar bet. Pat lost. Joe won.

Ten minutes later Joe said to Pat Bryce. "Would you mind seeing if she's all right?"

"Who's all right? Oh — your friend. Not at all."

Pat went into the ladies' room. She came out promptly. "There's no one in there."

Joe frowned. "She must have come out when I wasn't looking." He

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stepped to the blackjack game near the ladies' room.

"Did a girl come out of here — a blonde?"

The dealer shrugged. "Fifteen — twenty minutes ago"

Joe looked uncertainly at Pat and her escort, at the crap table, then left the casino.

She wasn't in the bar and he went out to the parking lot.

Her car was gone.

"Damn," Joe said under his breath. He started back to the Twilight Club, then stopped. A siren was wailing. He watched a red light approach and swing into the driveway before the Twilight Club.

A heavy-set man in his late thirties swung out of the car, ran into the building.

Gold lettering on the car read: *Sheriff.*

Joe went into the big building, approached the cashier's desk as the sheriff hung up the phone.

"I'm from the Falcon City *Times*," Joe said. "What happened?"

"Accident up the road. I just phoned for the ambulance."

"Bad?"

The sheriff nodded. "Car turned over three times. Only one person in it — a girl."

Joe said evenly, "A blonde? An old Chevrolet?"

"Know her? Girl who works — worked — at the Swedish Kitchen."

"Yes," said Joe. "I knew her."

Joe read the sheriff's report. "*Liquor. Apparently lost control on a curve.*"

He looked over her effects. A cheap purse with the usual woman's paraphernalia. Eighty-three cents in silver.

And a hundred dollar bill.

Joe said to the sheriff. "It smells."

The sheriff regarded him thoughtfully. "What smells?"

"The hundred. She was a waitress at the Swedish Kitchen."

"So?"

"She never saw a hundred dollars."

The sheriff looked at his fingernails. "She was out with you."

"Of course. And she'd had four martinis. She couldn't take it and went into the ladies' room — in the back room of the Twilight Club."

The door of the sheriff's office opened and Latimer and Carver came in. Mickey's face wore a crooked smile.

"She was out with you," he said. "She was blotto and you let her drive."

He smashed his fist into Joe's jaw. Joe reeled back, hit the steel files against the wall.

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The sheriff continued examining his nails. Chief Latimer looked thoughtfully at Joe.

Mickey advanced. "She was my girl. She was my girl, until you —"

That was the last Joe heard. Mickey's fist exploded on his jaw and Joe went out.

It was a few minutes after one when Joe faced the sheriff again. The sheriff was frowning thoughtfully. "I'm sorry, Webster, but there wasn't anything I could do. His girl had been killed. He lost control. You can prefer charges against him . . ."

"No charges," said Joe. He touched his swollen jaw. "But you can tell him from me, that I'm no friend of his."

"Don't make a mistake, Webster. Mickey Carver's a home town boy. You're new here. You don't want the police down on you."

"Cops," said Joe disdainfully. He left the sheriff's office, walked past the county court house building and down to the hotel.

In his room he soaked his jaw with wet towels. It relieved the swelling a little, but not the pain.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HARWOOD CAME into the office as Joe was laying out a half-page ad. He whistled as he noted Joe's swollen jaw.

"Run into the bathroom door in the dark?"

Joe regarded him sourly. "You know very well how I got this. The story's all over town."

"You forget the *Times* goes to press at three in the afternoon."

"The *Times* does, but the editor of the *Times* knew about this before midnight last night and he couldn't hold it until now."

"Have it your way."

Ginny entered and came over. "I'm sorry, Mr. Webster."

"It's all right, Ginny."

"I meant about Nell. I used to eat at the Swedish Kitchen now and then."

Wagoner and Jennings came in.

"Morning, Joe," Wagoner said cheerfully. "Come into my office."

Jennings followed the publisher. Joe got up and went after them.

"Lou came over to my house this morning," Wagoner said. "He was of

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the opinion that this was important enough to warrant a staff conference."

"It's too big a story to suppress," Jennings said quickly. "I thought we should discuss just how to handle it."

"What story?" asked Joe.

"Now, wait a minute, Webster," Jennings cried. "You aren't going to deny that — well, that you had trouble last night."

"I talked to Chief Latimer only a few minutes ago," Wagoner said.

"What did he tell you?"

Wagoner shrugged. "Just that you'd had a few drinks and swung at one of his men."

"We all have one too many now and then," Jennings said indulgently. "No harm in that. It's just — well, how shall we handle the story?"

"Print it any way you like."

"But we can't," cried Jennings. "You're a member of this staff. It — it reflects on the paper."

"Don't print anything, then."

Jennings appealed to the publisher. "How about it, Mr. Wagoner?"

"I'll think about it."

"Very well, sir."

Jennings turned and left the office. Joe started to follow.

"Joe!"

"Yes?"

"Close the door and tell me the real story."

Joe shut the door, returned and sat down. "To you, I'll tell it. I met this girl when I first came to town. I took her out and her boy friend turned out to be this cop — Mickey Carver. I dropped her and then yesterday she came in here and said she had to see me."

"Why — if you'd only met her once before?"

"She had the usual idea about newspapermen that people get from the movies. That they can do anything. Her boss was taking horse bets and the boys are moving in . . ."

"Here — in Falcon City?"

"This is a pretty wide open town."

"Oh, nonsense, Joe. Somebody's pulling your leg. This town is as clean as a boiled turnip."

Joe regarded the publisher thoughtfully. "Ever been at the Twilight Club?"

"Two or three times. Usual lake dance hall. Oh, I suppose the younger set tears it up a little."

"You know about the back room downstairs?"

Wagoner hesitated. "Rumors. I've had my own problems here." He

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paused. "There *is* a back room?"

"Dice, roulette, blackjack."

"I'm not too surprised. People insist on gambling."

"All right, Mr. Wagoner. I'll give it to you straight. The girl got mad at me because I told her I couldn't do anything. We went to the Twilight Club. I had two martinis. She had four — four fast ones. We started to play crap and she got sick. Went into the ladies' room. I thought she was in there kind of long, discovered she'd left when I wasn't looking . . . She drove away . . . and got killed. There was a hundred dollar bill in her purse. She had seven dollars when we went into the casino. She lost it. She only had some small change left."

"Now, wait a minute, Joe. Let's not make a mystery of this. You didn't go through her purse yourself, did you?"

"Of course not."

"Then you don't know for sure that she didn't have this hundred stashed away. Mad money."

"A hundred dollar bill?"

Wagoner pursed up his lips. "Joe, Sheriff Cooley phoned me at five-thirty this morning. He told me about you . . . and Mickey Carver . . ."

"She was Mickey's girl."

Wagoner nodded. "Cooley said Carver's all broken up over her." He paused. "He also said that the coroner had performed an autopsy. Somebody could have slipped her the hundred for — for a favor."

"No," said Joe bluntly. "We — we stopped on a side road on the way out. I haven't got a hundred dollars. And she wasn't — I don't *think* she was that kind of a girl."

"Of course not." The publisher bobbed his head. "I think we'd better forget the whole thing."

"What about Mickey Carver? *He* may not want to forget it."

Wagoner's eyes glinted. "No policeman will hit a member of this staff again. I promise you that. If Mickey bothers you, let me know."

Pat Bryce was talking with Ginny in the outer office when Joe left Wagoner's office.

"Mr. Webster," Pat exclaimed. "I had to come and tell you how sorry I am."

"Thanks, Miss Bryce."

"Of course I'd only seen her for a second, but she — she seemed like such a nice girl."

"Sure," said Joe. "Sure."

As Joe came out of the appliance shop, Chief Latimer's green Ford pulled

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up to the curb.

"Webster!"

Joe walked over. The chief was alone in the car. "Mickey won't bother you again," Latimer said. "I gave him a week off. He'll be all right when he gets back."

"My jaw will be healed by then."

"It was one of those things."

The chief shifted to reverse and prepared to back away from the curb. "Figure on staying in Falcon City?"

"Any reason I shouldn't?"

"None at all. Only — only I somehow had the idea that you were just more or less passing through. Lots of newspapermen do that."

"So I've heard. But me — I like Falcon City."

CHAPTER NINE

JOE SIPPED HIS COFFEE until Mrs. Jorgenson came out of the kitchen. Then he said: "I'd like to put ten on Brown Betsy in the fourth at Aqueduct."

She raised her head sharply, looked at Joe. "I don't know you."

"I've been in here before."

She shrugged in sudden surrender. "All right, what's the difference? Ten on Brown Betsy in the fourth at Aqueduct."

Joe slipped a ten dollar bill across the counter. Mrs. Jorgenson took the money. "Come to think of it, your face is familiar."

"I tried to sell you an ad a week ago."

"Of course! You work for the *Times*. Say . . . you're the fellow was out with Nell when . . ." Sudden rage flooded across Mrs. Jorgenson's features. "Why, you heel, you got her drunk and then let her drive. She wasn't a drinking girl."

"Nell," said Joe tonelessly, "asked me to go out with her that night. She wanted to talk to me about you — she thought I could help you. She told me about the boys that are muscling in on the book-making business."

Mrs. Jorgenson flinched. "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know . . ." She looked at the bill in her hand, thrust it violently at Joe. "Here — what's this for?"

"Brown Betsy in the fourth . . ."

"What do you think I am — a bookmaker or something? The nerve! Take your money and get out of here . . ."

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"Mrs. Jorgenson," Joe said earnestly, "I'm only trying to help you. Because Nell asked me . . ."

"Get out of here," shrieked Mrs. Jorgenson. "Get out of here before I call the police."

Joe got up, dropped a quarter on the counter and walked out of the Swedish Kitchen.

There were two barber chairs, two pool tables and one billiard table in Paddy Martin's place. Along one wall was a row of high chairs in which lounged a half dozen men. Two players were at one of the pool tables.

Joe strolled in, nodded to Paddy and moved beyond to the pool tables. He stopped to watch the game. A sleek, slick-haired youth ran eight balls, including a difficult bank shot.

Paddy walked over. "Sylvester's the best stick man in town," he said, nodding toward the sleek-haired player. "Say, where you from?"

"Round about. I'm the new man on the *Times*.

"The *Times!*" Paddy's face hardened. "You're the new advertising man I been hearing about."

Joe nodded. "Can I sell you a little ad?"

"What've I got to advertise?"

"Your barber shop, maybe."

"Do too much barber business now."

"Okay. I haven't been around before." He changed the subject. "Where can a man place a bet around here?"

"Wrong place," said Martin curtly.

"Must be some place in town where a man can place a bet on a nag."

"Never touch the stuff myself," said Paddy Martin walking off.

Joe followed Paddy to the front. "Every town's got a bookie," he persisted. "Never saw a place where a man couldn't lay a little bet on a horse."

"Not here you can't," snapped Paddy. Then under his breath, he added quickly: "Get lost, will you?"

Angrily, Joe stormed out. He maintained his angry pose until he was a safe distance from the barber shop.

There was a message at the office. "Call Mr. Harrison."

Joe picked up the phone and asked for the Twilight Club. A gruff voice answered, but Harrison came on in a moment.

"Mr. Webster," he said, "I want to talk to you about my ad."

"What about it?"

"Why, it's doing all right. At least business has been better. I've got a

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name orchestra coming out here and I thought I'd take a little flier and see if I couldn't draw a really good crowd."

"You probably can."

"Good. Then how about coming out here? We can fix up a nice ad between us."

Joe hesitated. "Okay. I'll be out right away."

He left the office and walked down the street to the corner where the single Falcon City cab could usually be found. The cab was there, but the driver, who was known as Bingo, was gone. However, he appeared in a moment, coming out of the Swedish Kitchen.

"Like to go out to the Twilight Club," Joe said.

"Cost you fifty cents. Dollar if I wait and bring you back."

"That's a deal."

Joe got in the cab and they started off. Joe said: "Where can a man bet on a horse in this town?"

Bingo's head swiveled around. "You kiddin'? Where *can't* you place a bet?"

"I'll bite. The church probably. All right, I saw you coming out of the Swedish Kitchen. That's *one* place you can't place a bet."

Bingo snorted. "Why do you think I was in there? To eat my dinner? I on'y et a hour ago."

"You mean you *can* place a bet in the Swedish Kitchen?"

"I'm telling you, I just gave the old Swedish girl two bucks on a pony."

Joe whistled. "I'll be darned. I wouldn't have guessed it. Paddy Martin, yes, but not Mrs. Jorgenson."

"She takes a lot of bets. Not as many as Paddy, of course, but enough. Link deSpelder does all right, too." Bingo chuckled. "Twilight Club, huh? Well, you can cut out the middleman, there. Give it right to the horse's mouth."

"Harrison, eh? He does all right. Dice games, slot machines, horses."

"Big operator, Harrison," said Bingo. "And there she is — the Twilight Club. Like I should wait for you?"

"I don't think I'll be long."

Joe got out of the taxi and entered the Twilight Club. The bar was deserted except for a bartender who was polishing glasses, and a chunky, swarthy individual who sat at one of the tables playing solitaire.

"Mr. Harrison around?" Joe asked the bartender.

It was the solitaire player who replied. "Who wants to know?"

"Joe Webster."

"Webster? Yeah." The man got up, crooked a finger at Joe.

He led Joe to an office off the bar, a pine-paneled office with modern

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furniture and a deep piled rug. Harrison was seated at his desk reading a restaurant trade journal.

"Ah, Webster," he said. "I've been expecting you." He nodded to the chunky man. "You've met Alf Perkins?"

"On the way in."

"Sit down, Webster. Like I told you on the phone, I'm having Lon Lucas here next week and I'd like to run some special ads. Three-four really big ads."

"Full page?"

"Half pages."

"A half page is seventy dollars."

Harrison nodded. "Let's say four half pages. I'll have them ready tomorrow."

"All right." Joe remained seated. Harrison smiled at him.

Joe got up. "Be seeing you."

"Fine, Webster, fine."

He let Joe get to the door before he finally got down to it. "Oh, Webster!"

Harrison cleared his throat. "Like to play the horses, don't you?"

"Not especially. Why?"

"No reason. Just thought that you *looked* like a horse player."

"I've bet on them once in awhile."

"Sure, thought so. Everybody takes a flier once in awhile. People have got to have action. If they don't get it one way they get it another. Horses, a little crap game once in awhile." He chuckled. "I've got a little table myself downstairs."

"I've been there."

"You have?"

"The other night."

"Good. Good. So you know the worst. Then you probably know that I take a few horse bets?"

"I've heard it."

"People have got to gamble. What I mean is, you know I run a game and take a bet. My, uh, my customers know it. But we don't, uh, advertise it — not in the newspaper. Catch on?"

"I'm slow," said Joe. "Say it again."

"What I mean is, you're from Chicago. So am I. We understand. But you come into a small town and people don't feel so good about those things. They do 'em, but they don't like people to talk about it. Little lady in town, takes a fifty cent bet now and then. All right, she's a bookie. But she don't like the name. You talk to her, you scare her stiff. Catch on?"

"Paddy Martin scares, too?"

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"When you act like a cop, yes. Anybody who runs a book is afraid of cops."

"Paddy beefed?"

Harrison shrugged. "Not exactly a beef . . ." Harrison blinked. "Okay, Webster, we talk the same language."

"In other words, if I keep my nose clean, I get the four half pages of advertising. A little grease."

Alf Perkins spoke up. "A clean nose don't get poked."

"Shut up, Alf!" snapped Harrison. He gestured to Joe. "We understand each other. Lay off!"

"Yes, I understand. Lay off and I get the grease. Otherwise . . ."

"All right, Webster," said Harrison coldly. He gestured to Alf. "Show him out, Alf."

"Come along, Mr. Webster," said Alf. He stood aside for Joe and took the nod from Harrison.

Joe went through the door to the bar. He continued on to the front door with Alf just behind him.

As he reached the front door, Alf spoke.

"Just a minute."

Joe turned. Alf smashed him a terrific blow in the stomach and as Joe bent forward, gasping, hit him on the jaw.

"That," said Alf, "is just a sample. Just a sample."

He stepped past Joe and opened the door. Then he caught Joe and propelled him through it.

Joe retched as he sucked in fresh air. He stood for a moment, retching and gasping. Bingo came running up.

"Feel sick, Mister?"

Joe shook his head. The cabby took his arm, led him to the cab.

"Where to?"

"The Faulkner Hotel."

Knuckles rapped the thin door panels. Joe sat up, swung his feet to the floor.

"Yes?"

"Joe?" The voice was Carl Wagoner's.

Joe got up and, stepping to the door, shot back the bolt.

Wagoner came in looking sharply at Joe. "The taxi driver came to my office. Said you looked sick. That was an hour ago. Thought I'd better come over."

"I'm all right now. Felt a little dizzy."

Wagoner crossed the room and sat down in the arm chair. "What hap-

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pened at the Twilight Club?"

"Harrison wants to buy some big ads. Half-page ads."

"And that made you sick?"

Joe shook his head. Wagoner took out a cigarette and lit it. "Go ahead."

"Hereafter I stick to selling advertising."

"Nothing wrong with selling advertising, is there?"

"No," said Joe. "There isn't."

Wagoner looked at his watch. "My wife and I have a dinner appointment in forty-five minutes. So have you."

"Me?"

"He asked me to bring along my editor."

"But I'm not your editor."

"Editor, advertising manager; what's the difference? He's trying to get the paper's support and who I bring won't make any difference." Wagoner paused. "It's Congressman Bryce."

"Congressman Bryce!" exclaimed Joe. "I can't go to his home."

"Why not?"

"Because . . ." Joe suddenly floundered. "What would I talk to a congressman about?"

"You don't have to talk to a congressman. He'll talk to you. Congressman Bryce is running for re-election. He wants our support."

"Are you giving it?"

"What do you think? Fred Bryce owns the Bryce Manufacturing Company which employs five hundred people—the industry that keeps Falcon City alive. Without it there'd be grass on the streets of this town. And he happens to be the congressman from this district. Has been for two terms. Yes, we'll support Congressman Bryce."

Bryce lived in a low, rambling, farm-type house. There was a circular drive in front which enclosed about an acre of lawn and there was probably another acre behind the house. The house itself had twelve rooms and five baths.

Joe got out of the cab and paid the driver. "This time you don't have to wait."

"This time I hope you don't get sick."

A white maid in a uniform opened the door in response to Joe's ring.

"Won't you come in?"

Congressman Bryce, Carl Wagoner and Mrs. Wagoner were in a pine-paneled study having a highball.

"Ah, here you are, Joe," said Wagoner as Joe entered. He got to his feet. "Congressman, here's the young man we were talking about."

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Congressman Bryce was in his early fifties. He had all of his hair and it was mostly dark. He had very little paunch and a fine grip. He said: "How are you, Mr. Webster?"

"Glad to know you, Congressman."

"Fred. Fred, to my friends. Here — what're you drinking?"

"The same as everyone."

Congressman Bryce reached for the decanter. Wagoner, smiling, said to Joe: "You haven't met Mrs. Wagoner."

Mrs. Wagoner was in her late thirties, a cool, intelligent looking woman. She gave her hand to Joe. "How're you, Joe? I've been wanting to meet you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Wagoner. I've wanted to meet you."

The congressman turned with Joe's drink. "Here you are . . . Joe, isn't it?"

Joe nodded and took the drink. The congressman raised his own glass. "Mud in your eye." Then wincing, "Excuse me, Mrs. Wagoner."

Mrs. Wagoner smiled. "Mud in *your* eye."

"Can *I* get in on the party?" asked Pat Bryce coming into the room. She was wearing a long cocktail gown and she looked better than Marilyn Monroe, Theda Bara and Cleopatra, all rolled into one.

"The offspring," cried Congressman Bryce. "Just like a politician — making an entrance. Carl, Mrs. Wagoner, my daughter, Pat. The young fellow's Joe Webster. Works on the *Times*. Don't go making eyes at him."

"I've already made eyes at him," said Pat coolly. Then: "Hello, Joe."

"Hello."

The maid came into the room. "Dinner is served."

The dinner, an excellent one, took an hour and a half. The congressman spoke well and ably on foreign affairs and domestic affairs. Lacking a pencil he wrote figures on the tablecloth with the tine of a fork. He proved conclusively that the State Department was riddled with Communists. He promised a cut in the income tax if he were re-elected. He denounced Labor and defended the Taft-Hartley Act.

Finally he pushed back his chair. "We'll have coffee in the library."

"We'll join you in a minute," said Pat, rising. "I want to see if we can get Groucho Marx on the TV set. You like Groucho, Joe?"

"My favorite comic."

"Mine, too."

The congressman and the Wagoners went to the library in the front of the house. Pat led Joe to the rear overlooking a terraced lawn. A room with a huge picture window contained a radio-phonograph, a large-screen television, and a sofa and chairs. The sofa faced the television set.

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Pat switched on a table lamp and dropped to the couch.

"When Dad gets started on politics I wish he'd stayed in business."

"He's still in business, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he doesn't put in much time on it. But politics . . ." She wrinkled her nose.

Joe leaned forward. "Maybe we can still get Groucho Marx."

"Did we come in here to watch television?"

"That's what you said."

"Don't be stupid."

"All right, what can we do?"

"Let's talk about it and see. I don't usually neck with a date the first time I'm out with him, but I'm not against the idea, all things being equal."

"Equal, like what?"

She turned sidewards, studied Joe through narrowed lids. "D'you know, I don't know a damned thing about you."

"We're tie on that."

"You mean Ginny Larson at your office hasn't given you a rundown on me?"

"Just a short one. That your father's a rich man, that you went to Smith while she had to go to work, and that you go traipsing around Washington, New York and Paris. For why she didn't say."

"What else does a girl run around for? Men!"

"Any you like a lot?"

"A Frenchman in France, an Italian in Italy, an Englishman in England and a Democrat in Washington."

"And the banker in Falcon City?"

"Oh, him. Luke's old, forty-three. I like them about . . . how old did you say you were?"

"Thirty-three."

"I'm twenty-four. Nine years difference. Better than nineteen. Ever been married?"

"Couldn't afford it."

"But there's been a girl?"

Joe said evenly: "Nothing serious."

"The girl — the girl who got killed?"

"Second time out with her. But . . ." He paused. "She was a good kid."

"Don't ever say that about me, Joe," Pat said fervently, "that I'm a good kid."

"I won't."

She looked at him sidewards — again. "You're still a mystery man, Joe. Where've you been? Where do you come from? Who are you?"

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"I'm the advertising manager of the Falcon City *Times*."

"Keep it up, Joe. Keep it up and you'll feel my claws." She showed her hands, curled up. The nails were nicely manicured, scarlet red.

Joe took her in his arms, kissed her. She returned his kiss vigorously and then drew back.

"Just an experiment."

"Well?"

"All right. But we'll take it easy. Get acquainted. I don't know, Joe. You may be the one." For just an instant a cloud flitted over her face. "It's hard to tell."

"How *do* you tell?"

"I don't know. I *think* I'll know if you're the right one. But let's not rush it."

"No," said Joe, "let's not rush it."

He took her in his arms and they clung to each other's lips for a long moment. Again it was Pat who drew back.

"I wonder if Groucho Marx is still on," she said.

"How was Groucho Marx last night?" Carl Wagoner asked Joe the next morning.

"He wasn't on — we were too late."

"See any other show?"

Joe looked at the publisher steadily. "We talked about politics."

"So did we," Wagoner smiled. "My wife likes you, Joe."

"I like her."

"She likes you because you're saving this business for me. You *have* saved it, you know."

"You're as good a salesman as I am."

"No, I'm not."

"You can hire salesmen."

"You can hire anyone, Joe. You can *buy* anyone."

"For the right price, yes."

"What's *your* price?"

"I don't know, Mr. Wagoner. Don't get me wrong. I'm not bragging. I've got a price. I've always had one. Sometimes I've had a damn low price tag. Lately — well, it isn't four half-pages of advertising. Unless —" He paused, "Unless you want the business."

"I told you," said Wagoner. "You're the advertising manager. You pick the ads you want."

"Then we're not carrying the Twilight Club anymore."

"You got the ad — you drop it."

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"Mickey Carver's back. Saw him this morning."

"Nobody lays a hand on a *Times* man," Wagoner said harshly. "Not if we lose every inch of advertising."

Joe nodded thoughtfully and left the publisher's office.

Joe walked into the front office. Ginny Larson had a new permanent, he noticed. And a new dress from the Style Shoppe.

She said to him: "It says in the Society Column tonight you were at Congressman Bryce's last night."

"With the boss. He wants the paper's support for his campaign."

"It didn't say that in the Society News. It didn't say either that Pat was there." She paused. "Was she?"

"She was."

"What do you think of her?"

"A — a good kid."

"A good kid," exclaimed Ginny. "Nobody'd ever say that about Pat Bryce. The least I ever heard was — well, 'striking.' She *is* striking looking. Or do you think she's too — too sophisticated?"

"What's sophisticated mean in a girl?"

"Pat."

"That's a nice dress you're wearing. New, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Got a permanent, too." He winked at her. "Better watch out."

He beat a hasty, victorious retreat. He'd been kind, but hadn't gone too far.

He left the *Times*. Up the street Alf Perkins and another thug — a bigger one — were leaving the Swedish Kitchen.

Joe got a package of cigarettes in the drug store, picked up the once-a-week ad he got from the druggist, then went into the Swedish Kitchen. He sat down at the counter.

Across from him was a dowdy farm woman of about fifty. She looked at Joe and looked through him. Her thoughts were far away.

Mrs. Jorgenson came forward. "What'll you have?" she asked listlessly.

"Coffee and a doughnut."

She got the coffee and the doughnut. Joe gave her a quarter and she gave him his change. She went off but returned suddenly.

"That's her mother," she said harshly. "Nell's mother. She's been sitting there for two hours. Just sitting."

Joe picked up his coffee cup and sipped at it. It was hot and rank. He put down the cup, poured in some water and tried the coffee again. It was cooler, but still tasted rank.

He asked: "She was there when Alf Perkins was in here?"

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"They talked to her and she didn't hear them. Go ahead, talk to her."

Joe picked up his coffee, walked around to the other side of the counter. He sat down beside Mrs. Woodson.

"I knew Nell," he said.

Mrs. Woodson did not seem to hear him. She continued to stare ahead. Her thoughts were miles and years away.

Joe said: "I was out with Nell the night — the night it happened."

She continued to look ahead, but she spoke. "Nellie was a good girl."

"She was a fine girl, Mrs. Woodson."

Mrs. Jorgenson came over. "Get her out of here. I can't stand it any more. Dammit, get her out."

"Nell worked for you a long time. She came to me because she wanted me to help you."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Alf Perkins was in here a few minutes ago. Alf Perkins and another gorilla."

"Are you trying to get me killed?" snapped Mrs. Jorgenson.

"You mean like Nell was killed?"

"That was an accident."

"Was it?"

"She was drunk. The cops said so. You shouldn't have let her drive."

"I didn't know she was driving. She went to the ladies' room and before I knew it she was gone."

"You got her drunk."

"She got drunk because of you," retorted Joe, stung. "I told her I couldn't help you and she got mad."

"I don't need any help."

"Not as long as you book two hundred a day."

"Damn you, who's been talking to you?"

"I've just been telling you. Nell."

Mrs. Woodson said: "Nellie was a good girl."

Mrs. Jorgenson let out a scream. "All right, she was a good girl. She was sleeping with a cop, but she was a good girl." She mimicked Mrs. Woodson shrilly: "*Nellie was a good girl!*"

Joe got up and walked out of the Swedish Kitchen.

The courthouse had been built before the turn of the century. It was a sandstone building and had been sandblasted only about a year ago.

The county jail was in a separate building, behind the courthouse. Falcon City used the county jail for its prisoners but the police department had its own quarters in the basement of the courthouse. The sheriff's quarters were in the jail building. The two departments had their own quarters and

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functioned separately, but they had a common jail.

Chief Latimer was cleaning a stubby barreled .38 when Joe entered. He looked up but continued to probe at the gun's innards with an oiled rag.

"Hello, Webster."

"Mickey Carver come on duty yet?"

The chief called: "Mickey!"

Mickey came out of an inner room. He glowered at Joe. "You still around?"

"I like Falcon City."

"Well, I don't. But I was raised here and I'm stuck with it. . . . You come here looking for trouble?"

"I don't look for trouble . . . Nell's mother is in town."

"So?"

"She's at the Swedish Kitchen."

"So?"

"I thought you might be interested."

"She's too old," sneered Mickey.

Chief Latimer said: "You talk too much with your mouth, Mickey."

"I saw the old lady. She wouldn't talk to me. You ask me, she's got bats in the steeple."

"She won't leave the Swedish Kitchen," Joe said. "She just sits there —"

"I know," cut in Mickey. "She sits and she yaps, 'Nellie was a good girl.' "

"Nellie was too good for you, Mickey," said the chief. To Joe: "I'll see that she gets home."

Joe left the Falcon City Police Station. He climbed the stairs, went through the courthouse, outside and to the sheriff's office.

The sheriff was putting up a "Wanted" poster.

"I wanted to ask you a couple of questions, Sheriff." Joe said.

"Shoot. I hear you're not getting much advertising from the Twilight Club."

Joe said bluntly: "They wanted to advertise their casino, but we didn't think you'd like it."

"Pretty sharp, ain't you?" The sheriff went to his desk, sat down behind it and like a king on his throne, took command. "Webster, I'm not going to talk to you about dice games or horses or anything else along those lines. You're not going to put me on a spot. You're not going to embarrass me. You're not going to pump me for information."

"Would you answer just one question —?"

"No," said the sheriff bluntly.

Joe paused, then shook his head. "I *was* going to ask you who was the political boss of this county."

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"And I'm not going to answer that question."

"All right, Sheriff, let it ride."

Joe got to the door before the sheriff spoke. "I *will* give you some advice though. . . . Be careful!"

"Thanks. My jaw still hurts."

Joe left the sheriff's office and found Bingo sitting in his cab on the corner.

"Feel like a ride out in the country?"

"If I get paid I feel like it," retorted Bingo. "If it's for free, I can watch the birdies right here. Take a look at that flock of starlings over in that tree . . ."

"Let's look at them out in the country."

The car roared off, made a left turn at the next intersection and rolled toward the city limits.

"Any special place or are we just sight-seeing?"

"What's east?"

"Little place called Rebus."

"What's after Rebus?"

"Marble Lake. Resort town. After Marble Lake nothing until you get over in the next county."

"How far is Rebus?"

"From Falcon City it's twelve miles. Marble Lake's four miles beyond. County's thirty-two miles wide. Falcon City's in the center of the county . . . Rebus far enough?"

"We'll see when we get there."

"I thought maybe that's where you wanted to go. Saw you come out of the sheriff's office. Rebus is his home town."

"Good man, the sheriff."

"Yeah, good man," agreed Bingo.

Bingo lapsed into silence for almost a mile. Then he spoke again. "He was a doggone good man when he was only a deputy. Rebus used to be a clean little place. Now . . ." He shrugged expressively. Then he nodded ahead. "There she is. Want to stop?"

"Get some gas at that station."

"I don't need any — not much, anyway."

"Fill up. I'll pay."

Bingo swung the cab into the filling station. A wiry, middle-aged man in denims came around to the pumps.

"Fill 'er up," said Bingo.

Joe got out and walked into the station. He got two soft drinks out of a machine, noted a pinball game beside the soft drink dispenser.

He brought out the drinks and gave one to Bingo. Then he walked

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around to the gas station attendant. "Rebus is Sheriff Cooley's home town, isn't it?"

"Yep, born and raised here. That's his dad's place down there, the general store."

"The store?" Bingo asked.

"The store."

The taxi pulled up to the store. It was a typical Michigan rural store, carrying groceries, dry goods, a meat counter in the rear and packed tightly wherever there was floor space, a conglomeration of refrigerators, furnace heaters and television sets.

An elderly man was grinding up hamburger behind the meat counter. There were no customers in the store. Joe walked to the rear.

"Mr. Cooley?"

"That's me."

"I'm from the Falcon City *Times* . . ."

"Advertising?"

"I'm the advertising manager, yes, but . . ."

"Shucks," said the elder Cooley, "what'd be the use of me advertising in your paper? Folks from Falcon City wouldn't come 'way out here to trade with me."

"You may be right, Mr. Cooley . . . Cooley? Say, you related to the county sheriff?"

"He's my boy!"

"Is that so? He's a big man over in Falcon City."

"He was a big man here in Rebus."

"As a deputy. But now he's the sheriff. No telling where a sheriff will go. He might become governor one day."

"You know Ed?"

"Of course."

"He tell you he wants to be governor?"

"No. I just mentioned it as a possibility. A former sheriff once became president of the United States."

"That's what Ed used to say. Grover Cleveland . . ." Cooley suddenly winced and looked toward the rear of the store. "Phone rang. Excuse me."

Joe hadn't heard any phone ring, but Cooley walked off quickly. He went through a door in the rear and closed it carefully.

Joe strolled back to the door and pretended to examine some merchandise on the nearby shelf. Behind the door a mechanical crank whirred, a bell tinkled.

"Falcon City?" Joe heard the muffled voice of Cooley. "That you, Ed? Listen, there's a fellow here asking questions about you . . . Yeah, that's

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right, that's him all right." A long pause, then: "All right, Ed, I'll do that."

Joe moved swiftly back to the meat counter and was studying the ring bologna when the elder Cooley returned.

"Yes sir, now where were we?"

"We were talking about your son, Ed."

"That's right, we was. You said you knew him. Tell you what, any friend of Ed's is a friend of mine. Let's see, you said you was with the Falcon City *Times*. Good newspaper. Been thinkin' I'd run an ad with you. You suppose you could fix me up something, say about a ten dollar ad?"

"Why yes, I could, but you just said a minute ago that you didn't think people would come out from Falcon City to buy from you."

"Matter of fact, lots of people come out here from the city. And lots of people around here get the paper. Ought to keep your name before them. Yessir, you fix me up a ten dollar ad. Run it for a few weeks."

A few minutes later Joe returned to the taxicab. Bingo was gone but he came out of a gas station across the street. He was whistling cheerfully.

"Pretty chipper," Joe observed.

"Just made a buck and a quarter." Bingo winked. "The little oranges lined up for me."

Joe exclaimed, "A slot machine? Here in the sheriff's home town?"

"Why not? They're everywhere else in the county. Why should this place be an exception?"

Joe got into the cab. Bingo climbed behind the wheel. "Where now?"

"Falcon City."

"Think you got enough trouble stirred up?"

Joe grimaced. "Aren't you talking out of turn?"

"The sheriff ain't going to like your checking up on him."

"The sheriff's father just gave me an ad."

Bingo whistled. "Did he check with the sheriff? I wonder." He hesitated. "All right, let's put him in the neutral column. Don't forget Chief Latimer. He's Mickey Carver's boss and Mickey don't do anything his boss don't like. And last, but not least, there's Harrison who owns the Twilight Club."

"Is that all he owns?"

"How do you mean?"

"I thought maybe he also owned Chief Latimer."

"Ouch! It's things like that that get a fellow into trouble. Like I said, I'm only a cabby. I drive people around for a living."

Ginny called to Joe as he entered the front office of the Falcon City *Times*. "Oh, Mr. Webster, message for you."

He walked to her desk and she handed him a slip of paper. On it was writ-

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ten: "Congressman Bryce phoned. Wants you to come out to the Bryce Manufacturing Company plant."

Ginny's eyes met his as he looked up from reading. "You wrote this down?"

She nodded.

"Congressman Bryce called himself?"

"His secretary. About forty-five minutes ago."

"It's after five. He's probably gone home by now."

"Why don't you phone?" Ginny picked up the phone. "I'll get him for you."

Joe put out a hand to stop her, then thought better of it. Ginny put through the call.

"Congressman Bryce, please. Mr. Webster calling." She listened, said: "Just a moment." She handed the phone to Joe. "His secretary's on the line."

Joe took the phone. "I just wanted to check if Congressman Bryce is still there."

"Why, no, he isn't, Mr. Webster," said Bryce's secretary. "But he said to leave word if you called to come out here, and wait for him. He expects to be back shortly."

"All right, I'll be out." Joe put down the receiver.

"I guess you made a hit with the congressman," said Ginny watching his face closely.

He left the office and started toward the cab stand. A horn honked and a voice called: "Taxi, Mister?"

It was Pat Bryce in a green convertible Cadillac. He stepped down from the curb.

"Can I drive you somewhere?"

"To your father's plant — if you're going that way."

"That's just where I'm going."

He got into the car and she zoomed it away. She turned right at the first corner. "I didn't get your phone call this morning."

"I didn't call."

"That's what I said."

"I didn't know I was supposed to call."

"You weren't, but did'nt you *feel* like calling?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't."

He saw her stiffen. For a moment she drove in silence. Then: "Well, *I* thought about calling *you*."

"I'm a working man, Pat."

"Meaning what?"

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"Meaning that I work for a living. I get seventy-five dollars a week."

She exclaimed, "Seventy-five dollars a *week?*"

"A week. About what you spend in an evening in New York."

"What somebody else spends on me — if we go to a cheap place."

"That's what I mean. Seventy-five dollars is good money in Falcon City — if you live like Falcon City."

"Now you're getting complicated."

The Bryce Manufacturing Company plant consisted of a two-story brick building covering about an acre of ground. A two-acre parking lot and the building itself were enclosed by a high wire fence. Only a dozen cars remained in the parking lot as Pat Bryce drove in.

"Guess everybody's gone home by now," she remarked.

She parked the car near the building and they got out. Pat led the way through a gate, across an areaway and into the main building.

"I've never asked before," said Joe, "but what does the Bryce Manufacturing Company make?"

"How should I know?" retorted Pat. "Everything, I guess. I hear talk about pistons or something like that. Machine parts — carbon steel products."

They entered a reception room in which a switchboard operator was making night connections.

"Hello," Pat said brightly. "Miss Fellows still here?"

"I believe so, Miss Bryce."

Pat continued on to an inner office. A middle-aged woman was manicuring her nails, standing in front of a desk.

"Dad come back yet, Milly?" Pat asked.

Miss Fellows shook her head. "Why, no, he hasn't, Pat." She picked up her purse. "I've got to run along now."

"All right, Milly. Oh — this is Mr. Webster."

"I spoke to him on the phone."

"How are you, Miss Fellows?"

"Very well, thank you. I'm sorry to be so abrupt, but I have an important engagement this evening."

She took her departure. Pat hesitated. "Guess you might as well wait in Dad's office." She started forward.

Joe followed.

Congressman Bryce's inner sanctum was about thirty by thirty, completely pine-paneled, with deep leather chairs, two sofas and a complete adjoining bathroom and dressing room.

Pat closed the door, came to Joe.

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"Damn you," she said.

She put her arms around his neck and crushed her mouth to his. It was a hard kiss and a passionate one. It was Joe who drew away.

"What if your father walks in?"

"Then he'll see me kissing you."

She kissed him again.

"He likes you. I guess — I guess I do, too."

"That's good," said Joe. "That's fine. But I make seventy-five a week."

She left him then, walked to one of the leather couches and sat down. She patted the leather beside her. "We'll talk about it. I got the impression that you were Mr. Wagoner's right hand man."

"It's still a small newspaper and seventy-five is good pay. Especially when you consider how short a time I've been on the paper."

"How short a time?"

"Less than a month."

"A month? That's all you've been here? Where're you from?" she exclaimed. "Joe — I don't know a darned thing about you. I've *got* to know — everything . . ."

"What, for instance?"

"Where you're from — the women in your life."

"There aren't any women."

"You've always been a newspaper man?"

"Not always."

"Do I have to pull it out of you? What else have you done?"

"A lot of things — nothing important."

"Don't be so modest. You're no small town hick. You've been around — you've done things."

"No, I haven't. Believe me, Pat, I — I've never done anything important. The job I've got now is the best I've ever had."

She drew away from him, regarded him narrowly. "What is it, Joe? What're you trying to say?"

"I'm trying to say, Pat," Joe said evenly, "that — I'm no good for you."

"All right, maybe you haven't had the breaks. A job isn't everything. Dad's got a lot of jobs here . . ."

"That's out," Joe said quickly.

"Proud? All right, I don't blame you. The jobs here don't amount to anything anway. There must be something . . ." She stopped, shook her head. "You're not telling me a thing. You've put a wall between us and I can't see through it. I don't like it."

He remained quiet. She reached out, took his hand. "Joe, remember what I said last night. That — that you might be the one?"

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"I remember," he said dully.

"I've been thinking about it ever since last night. I — I'm almost sure. And you — you're trying to hold me off — you're trying to push me away. What is it?"

She gripped his hand hard, suddenly threw herself into his arms. Her mouth was hungry against his.

Joe knew that this was it.

Pat was the girl.

She whispered, "I love you, Joe."

He kissed her mouth, her chin, her throat. Her mouth found his again.

"I love you," she repeated, then fiercely, "Say it, damn you, say it!"

He said: "I love you."

Her hand caught his, pressed it against her firm breast. She pushed his hand down. His fingers touched the warm flesh.

He said hoarsely, "Your father —"

"I locked the door."

"But he'll be here any minute."

"Don't be a fool. *He* didn't call you. It was me. He — he won't be here!"

Pat said, "Dad's going to be awfully surprised. He always thought I'd marry a duke or a count."

Joe said carelessly, "I knew a count once. He was cooking spaghetti at —" Then he caught himself.

"A count cooking spaghetti? Where?"

"Just a joke," Joe said. His arm tightened about her. She half turned, kissed him twice.

"When you let go, you're very funny. You didn't learn your dialogue in any small town. All right, Mystery Man, we're back on that same old subject. You. Talk!"

"I'll talk," said Joe, "after I get something to eat. I forgot lunch today."

"Just like a man. Hungry at a time like this." But she disengaged herself from his embrace and sat up. She adjusted her clothes.

"Sorry?"

"No. Glad."

"So am I." She started to fix her hair, suddenly caught both his hands.

"I'm sure now, Joe. It's you — forever. I love you." She waited. "Say it!"

"I love you, Pat."

"Don't make me force you every time." She let go of his hands, sprang to her feet. "Good heavens, it's after seven o'clock."

"I knew it was past my dinner, and lunch."

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"All right, we'll go and eat."

"I ought to change my shirt. And I need a shave."

She rubbed her hand across his chin. "Ouch. Like a wire brush." She sighed. "All right, the sooner you get shaved, the sooner we'll be together again."

They got into the car and Pat drove to the hotel. "I could come up with you," she said. "But this *is* Falcon City. I'll wait — hurry up."

"Ten minutes."

Joe hurried into the hotel, got his key and went upstairs. His door was unlocked and there was a light on in the room.

Mrs. Woodson was sitting in the armchair.

Joe stepped in, closed the door.

"Who let you in?"

"Policeman," she said dully. "He say I should wait here."

"But you can't. I — I live here."

"Policeman," Mrs. Woodson repeated.

"Mickey Carver," Joe said savagely. "He brought you here. Damn him to hell. All right, Mickey Carver was Nell's —" He could not bring himself to say it. "Mickey was Nell's boy friend."

"Nellie was a good girl," Mrs. Woodson chanted.

Joe groaned, headed for the bathroom. He shaved, came out and she was still sitting there. He got a clean shirt from the bureau, put it on. Knotting a tie, he said to her:

"You can't stay here, Mrs. Woodson. I'm going out."

"I stay here," Mrs. Woodson said. "Nellie was a good girl."

Joe groaned. He put on his shirt, looked at Mrs. Woodson and shaking his head, went out.

Downstairs, Pat said: "I was just going to blow my horn." He climbed in beside her and she patted his clean-shaven face.

"Nice."

"Where do we eat?"

"The Twilight Club."

Joe almost choked. "I don't think they like me out there."

"Don't be silly. I know Mr. Harrison very well. Any friend of mine —"

"I know — *is* a friend of his." He shrugged. "You're the driver."

They entered the Twilight Club and made their way to the dining room. A single booth was vacant and they sat down in it.

Jennings, the editor of the *Times*, popped over. "Joe, old man, come and join us."

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Joe looked at Pat. "Why not?" Pat asked. "I want to meet your friends."

"Mr. Jennings is editor of the *Times*."

"How interesting. How are you, Mr. Jennings?"

Jennings practically drooled over Pat. "I saw you in the office last week, Miss Bryce." He looked over his shoulder. "I want you to meet my wife."

Pat rose and she and Joe followed Jennings to another booth. Mrs. Jennings turned out to be a rather dowdy, fleshy woman of around thirty.

"How are you, Miss Bryce?" she gushed. "I've read so much about you in our paper I almost feel as if I know you."

"I don't rate two lines in the paper," said Pat. "It's my dad. He's a politician and he needs publicity."

"There are politicians," said Jennings sagely, "and statesmen. I don't think any fair-minded person would refer to your father as a politician."

"Did you ever hear him make a speech?"

The banter was knocked around for a few minutes with both Mr. and Mrs. Jennings trying to be ingratiating to Pat. Joe was left out of the conversation.

The Jenningses had already ordered and a waiter came to take Pat's and Joe's orders. When he went off, Jennings said to Joe: "Have you seen the boss around? He said something about dropping out here tonight."

"He didn't say anything to me."

"Didn't he?" Jennings seemed pleased. "He told me he didn't go out very often but he thought tonight he'd bring out his wife."

"A special occasion?"

"He didn't say."

A man left the bar and came over to the booth. He was a hulking looking bruiser wearing a well tailored double-breasted suit. His eyes were fixed on Joe.

"Don't I know you?" he asked bluntly.

"Could be," replied Joe, while cold fingers grabbed at his vitals. "I live in Falcon City."

"Nah — not from here. I'm a stranger here myself. I know you from before."

"My name is Webster," retorted Joe. "I work for the Falcon City *Times*."

"Nah, you're not a newspaper reporter. I don't place you that way in my mind." The man studied Joe reflectively. "D'you know me?"

"Can't say that I do."

"Fogarty's the name. They call me Flip Fogarty back in —" He stabbed a huge forefinger at Joe. "New York!"

"New York?"

"That's where I know you from."

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"Sorry, I've never been in New York."

"Brooklyn?"

"No."

"Miami?"

"Not there either."

"Webster," said Flip Fogarty. He shook his head. "That don't register, but your face does. I'll get it, don't worry." He turned away abruptly and went back to the bar.

"Ugly looking brute," said Pat, shuddering lightly.

"I've seen him," said Joe. "Right here in Falcon City. In fact, I believe he's employed by our friend, the owner of the Twilight Club. I think he's a collector."

"Collector for what?" asked Jennings.

"For Harrison's other business."

Jennings looked resentfully at Joe. "You're referring, I presume, to those rumors about Harrison —"

Joe turned to Pat. "Did you ever hear any rumors about Harrison?"

"Yes, I have," Pat replied promptly. "And I'm going to try them out as soon as we eat this dinner."

A half hour later Jennings outfumbled Joe on the check and the latter paid it unenthusiastically. He had three dollars and some change left after tipping the waiter.

Under the table Pat's hand found his own and pressed a folded bill into his hand. He tried to force it back to her but she brought both hands above the table.

"Now," she said brightly, "how about trying Lady Luck?"

"You're leaving?" asked Mrs. Jennings in dismay.

"Just to go downstairs. Come along?"

"What's downstairs?"

Joe nodded to Jennings. "You tell her."

"Damned if I know."

"Then come along and see."

The group went down to the bowling alley and crossed to the casino. As they entered, Jennings emitted a low whistle.

"Gambling!"

Mrs. Jennings shuddered. "Isn't — isn't this illegal?"

"Illegal and immoral," replied Pat flippantly.

Mrs. Wagoner waved from the blackjack table. "Hi, there." Joe and Pat started toward her.

"Hello, kids," Mrs. Wagoner said warmly. Then to the dealer: "Hit me

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lightly . . . That's too much. You win." To Joe: "You two getting on?"

"Ask her."

"Fair," said Pat. "Just fair." And to show she didn't mean the words, she took Joe's hand.

Wagoner, at the dice layout, caught Joe's eye. He signalled to him to come over. Pat stayed at the blackjack table as Joe went on.

"Dice are hot tonight," said Wagoner as Joe came up.

"I'll cool them off," replied Joe. He put a dollar on "Come."

The dice came up six-six. "See what I mean?"

Jennings came up on the other side of Wagoner. "Good evening, Mr. Wagoner."

"Hello, Jennings. Didn't know you were a gambling man."

"I'm not ordinarily, but when in Rome — ha-ha!" he laughed feebly. "I'll venture a quarter."

"Over in the slot machine. Smallest bet here is a dollar."

The dice came up to Jennings. He hesitated. "All right, I'll risk a dollar."

He put two halves on the line. Joe promptly put a dollar on "Don't Pass."

Jennings threw an eleven. "What do I do now?"

"You let it ride," said Wagoner.

Joe again bet against the dice. Jennings threw a seven. Joe hesitated. He was down to his small change — except for the bill Pat had forced on him. He took it out of his pocket, dropped it on the felt. Then he saw that it was a hundred dollar bill.

He was startled. He had assumed it was a ten, possibly a twenty. He somehow hadn't thought of anyone in Falcon City carrying around hundred dollar bills.

Yet Nell Woodson had had a hundred dollar bill.

"Ace-deuce," the stickman droned. "The player loses." Four yellow chips were placed atop Joe's hundred dollar bill.

"You certainly cooled them off," growled Wagoner.

"The dice are always cold — except when I bet against them."

He started to reach for the chips and hundred dollar bill, but was too late. Jennings, nervous, had thrown out the dice.

Joe started to protest angrily, stopped.

"Boxcars," droned the stickman.

He put out eight yellow chips beside Joe's stack.

"You'll have to draw down now, sir," he said to Joe. "Two hundred is the house limit."

"Cash me in."

The stickman pressed a button. "Just a moment, sir."

A door at the side of the room opened and Alf Perkins came in. He

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crossed to the dice table.

"Twelve yellows," said the stickman. "Cash in."

Alf looked at Joe and grunted. "How'd you get in?"

"On my two feet."

"You may not go out that way."

"Here, what's this?" interrupted Wagoner.

Alf looked at the publisher with a jaundiced eye. "Who're you, Grampa?"

"Be damned," swore Wagoner. "Do you work for Harrison?"

"Either that or he works for me. What's it to you?"

Wagoner flushed, was about to explode, when Pat Bryce came up. "Hello, Mr. Wagoner."

Alf promptly became ingratiating. "Friends of yours, Miss Bryce?"

"*Very* good friends."

"That's okay with me, then. Here —" He whipped out a flat packet of bills, peeled off three hundreds and dropped them on the table before Joe. "Your payoff." He nodded to Wagoner. "Excuse it, Mister."

He went off, but Wagoner was not mollified. "Hoodlum like that shouldn't even be allowed in a place like this. I'm still going to see Harrison about him."

"Harrison doesn't like the *Times*," said Joe. "Not since yesterday."

"He'll like it less if I get after him in the paper."

Harrison came out of his office. Flip Fogarty was behind him. Harrison erased his frown when he saw Wagoner.

"Mr. Wagoner, this is a pleasure."

"So far it hasn't been," Wagoner replied bluntly. "I must say some of your employees —"

"I know, I know," Harrison sighed. "Alf told me. Got a little, ah, flip with one of the patrons. He didn't know you, however."

Fogarty stabbed at Joe. "Broadway — yeah!"

"Keep guessing," said Joe.

"Nah — I ain't guessing anymore. It's New York, all right. I'm sure. And I'll place you, too."

Harrison scowled at Fogarty. "This is Mr. Wagoner, the publisher of our local newspaper."

"Sure, sure," agreed Fogarty. "How're you?" He pointed at Joe. "I know your friend from New York."

"He knows someone who looks like me," Joe corrected. He paused. "I've never been to New York."

"I feel like a drink," said Pat Bryce suddenly.

"So do I," Joe added promptly.

"In my office," Harrison smile brightly. "On the house."

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"I'd like mine at the bar," retorted Joe. "And I'll pay for it."

"Let's go," said Pat.

Harrison's smile faded. "All right, Webster, have your drink upstairs. Mr. Wagoner, you'll join me in my office?"

Wagoner hesitated, then shrugged. "Why not?" He turned to Joe and Pat. "See you kids later."

Joe and Pat left the casino, went through the bowling alley and climbed to the main floor. As they entered the bar, Chief Latimer came toward Joe.

"Been looking for you."

Joe looked at him sharply. "What for?"

"There's been a — a death. A woman fell from your hotel room."

Joe stiffened. "What are you talking about?"

"Mrs. Woodson," said Latimer doggedly. "She fell — or jumped from your hotel room."

Pat cried out, "Oh, no! That — that's impossible."

Joe turned to Pat. "I'll go with him."

Pat caught his arm. To the chief: "You're not accusing him — of anything?"

"It's routine — just routine questioning."

"It's all right, Pat," Joe said.

"I'll get Dad."

"That won't be necessary, Miss Bryce," Latimer said. "I just want to talk to Webster a few minutes."

"Call me, Joe," Pat said. "I'll be at home waiting."

Joe nodded and followed the chief.

The chief's car was parked outside the door. Mickey Carver was behind the wheel.

Joe and the chief got into the back seat. Mickey started the motor, swung the car out toward the road.

Joe said: "There isn't a thing I can tell you."

Latimer made no response.

In the police station Chief Latimer signaled to Joe to sit down in an armchair.

"All right," he finally said. "Talk."

"Sure," said Joe. "Name the subject."

Latimer's eyes smoldered. "You think murder is funny?"

"You can save yourself a lot of trouble," put in Mickey Carver, "by spilling it now."

"You really think I know anything about — about Mrs. Woodson?"

"That's what we're going to find out." Latimer indicated the clock on

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the wall: "Where were you at seven-forty-five?"

At seven-forty-five Joe had been in his room at the hotel. Mrs. Woodson had been there — alive.

He said, "I was in my room shaving."

"Who was in the room with you?"

Joe drew a deep breath. "No one."

"What time did you leave your room?"

"I wasn't there more than fifteen minutes. I left at probably five minutes to eight."

"You were out with the Bryce girl. When did you pick her up?"

Joe said, "Look, we don't have to bring her into this —"

Latimer snapped, "I asked you a question."

"You're barking up the wrong tree —"

Mickey Carver stepped up to Joe's chair.

"The chief asked you a question." His huge fist came up.

"Hold it, Mickey!" Latimer waved Carver back. "No rough stuff." To Joe: "You left your room at eight."

"About five minutes to eight."

"Five minutes to eight. What time did you pick up Miss Bryce?"

"Right then. She was waiting for me outside."

Latimer didn't like that. He bared his teeth. "You trying to tell me Pat Bryce came to pick you up?"

"No. She — we were out before and I wanted to stop at the hotel and shave. She waited for me downstairs —"

Latimer looked at Mickey Carver. "Baloney," sneered Mickey.

"Lying isn't going to help you," said Latimer. "I'm going to check — and double check — everything you say."

"Go ahead. I'm telling the truth —"

"Let's repeat it then. Miss Bryce drove you to the hotel and waited outside while you went up and shaved. She was downstairs when you came out?"

"That's right."

"Where'd you pick her up?" demanded Mickey.

"Near the *Times* office."

"What time?"

"It was early. Possibly five-thirty."

The chief picked it up. "Five-thirty? And you were in the hotel at seven-forty-five. What'd you do during that time?"

"We drove out to Congressman Bryce's factory."

"We can check that."

"Of course."

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"You visited with Bryce for two hours?"

"I didn't say that. He wasn't at the plant and we — we waited."

"For two hours?"

"Yes."

The door opened and Sheriff Cooley came in. He nodded to Joe. Latimer did not seem pleased to see the sheriff.

"Can't get much out of him."

"What did you expect to get?"

Latimer scowled. "Why would she go up there to jump out of a window?"

The sheriff shrugged. "You saw her earlier."

"I know. She was looney, but dammit, the coincidence is too much. Her daughter was running around with him and got herself killed —"

"A mile from where he was."

"The old lady wasn't a mile away," put in Mickey. "She jumped from his room. You ask me, he's lying through his teeth."

The sheriff said: "Suicide. I'm going to write it that way."

"He was in his room only ten minutes before she was found," persisted Latimer.

"Ten minutes is a long time."

"It's a short time, too." The chief frowned. "He claims Pat Bryce was waiting for him downstairs while he went up to his room."

"In front of the hotel?"

Joe said, "In front."

The sheriff spread out his hands, palms upwards. "That's where her body was. Anyone out front would have seen it land."

"At ten minutes after eight," Joe said, "we were at the Twilight Club — ordering dinner."

Latimer exclaimed peevishly, "Why would she come to your hotel? How'd she get into your room?"

"I don't know," said Joe. He pointed to the phone. "Miss Bryce is at home. Why don't you phone and ask her what time we got to the Twilight Club? Or ask the waiter at the club — or Jennings, who had dinner with us?"

Latimer came to a sudden decision. "You can go."

Joe got up. He nodded to the sheriff and walked out.

Outside the courthouse, Joe turned on the sidewalk that led to the jail and sheriff's office in the rear.

Sheriff Cooley came in. "Come inside," he said. He opened a door that led into a plainly furnished room. He closed the door carefully.

"Thanks," Joe said.

"He didn't have a leg to stand on."

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"I didn't mean for that. I meant — for the ad."

"What ad?"

"The ad your father gave me this afternoon."

"You sold my father an ad?"

"After he talked to you on the phone."

"Webster," the sheriff said. "My father owns a store. If he thinks your paper will bring him some business, he's got a right to run an ad in it."

"Sure," said Joe, "that's right. But sometimes merchants don't advertise in a newspaper because they don't like someone on the staff. And sometimes they take an ad because they're trying to get something out of the paper —"

"I told you this afternoon, Webster," the sheriff said patiently. "You're not going to get anything out of me. What I said in Latimer's office didn't mean anything. He had nothing against you. Nothing to build a case on. A mussed bed —"

"What?"

"Didn't he tell you?"

"He didn't tell me anything."

"The bed was mussed," the sheriff said carefully. "And she didn't have her dress on. That's how we knew it was your room. Her dress was in it."

Joe said tautly, "She'd taken off her dress before — before she —"

"Yes."

"And a mussed bed?"

The sheriff hesitated. "A mussed bed."

Red crept from Joe's throat to his face. The sheriff noted it. "You weren't there."

"I know. It — it's a crack Mickey Carver made this afternoon. About Mrs. Woodson."

"Mickey," the sheriff said carefully, "is a loud mouthed baboon."

"That's what he was thinking," Joe said slowly. "Nell's mother and —" He shuddered.

"She didn't know what she was doing," the sheriff said. "I talked to her — I tried to put her on a bus and she wouldn't go. I didn't have the heart to force her and when she said she had a room in town —"

"When was that?"

"After you were here this afternoon."

Joe nodded thoughtfully and went to the door. With his hand on the knob he turned. "I was also thinking," he said. "If a man didn't want to choose sides openly, he might get a friend — or a relative — to choose the side for him."

"I've got to live here, Webster, and I've got to work with people."

"Sure, I know."

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Pat's Cadillac was at the curb in front of the courthouse. She leaned across and opened the door for him.

He got in. She started the motor, drove a half block and stopped the car.

"All right, Joey boy," she said. "It's time you told me about Nell Woodson."

"That was before I met you."

"Partly. But go ahead. Just how casual was your, shall we say, friendship?"

"I didn't tell you it was casual."

"You said you'd only met her once or twice."

"That's right."

"And in two dates —" Her voice almost became shrill. "*Did you, Joe?*"

"No," said Joe savagely.

"You're lying!"

"All right, I'm lying."

"Damn you, Joe. I've got to know the truth."

"You won't believe me if I tell you the truth."

Pat said poignantly, "I love you, Joe. I love you. That's why I've got to know."

"Baby," said Joe, "I'm thirty-three years old. I didn't get out of grammar school yesterday. I've been around."

"I don't care about that. I don't even want to know. Not before. Only — only since I met you. I saw you with her and I didn't think much of her. Then I hear this —"

"What did you hear?"

"That you and her — *Did you, Joe?*"

"I answered that question."

"She was drunk when she — when she was driving. But now — her mother — coming to your room —"

"She was out of her mind. The sheriff talked to her this afternoon. So did a dozen other people. The woman who runs the Swedish Kitchen. Mrs. Woodson sat there all afternoon. They couldn't get her to leave."

Pat shuddered. "It's horrible. I — I was so happy a little while ago and now — now it seems sordid. I don't mean about — about us, Joe. You know that." She reached over and caught his hand. She tried a smile. "We'll be all right again, won't we?"

"Of course we will."

She drew a deep breath and exhaled heavily. "It's all right, Joe. I want you all to myself." She squeezed his hand. "Give me a cigarette."

He gave her one and lit one himself. She drew in a great mouthful of smoke and exhaled. "Strange about that character insisting he knew you."

Joe exhaled and nodded. "People are always mistaking people."

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"How come you've never been to New York?"

Joe said: "I've never been to Omaha, Nebraska."

A sudden cloud flitted over Pat's face and she shook her head in annoyance. "That's the other thing that keeps bothering me, Joe. I talk and talk about myself, and you — you don't tell me anything about yourself at all. If people fall in love and get married, they ought to know each other —" She looked at Joe. "We *are* getting married."

"I told you, Baby. I'm getting seventy-five dollars a week —"

"All right, Mr. Webster," she said suddenly. "I'll hold myself in. From here on you make the advances."

Joe kissed her and for a moment she clung to him.

"That's better."

"I'll improve with practice."

"You're no amateur, Joey boy. I know *that*." She puffed on her cigarette. "Now, the story of your life. In one hundred well-chosen words. Born, St. Louis. College?"

"No."

"How come?"

"Lots of people don't go to college. Can't afford it."

"Round one. High school?"

"I graduated. Okay-good. Head of the class. Even voted most likely to succeed."

"Now you're cooking with helium. Next."

"I worked for a shoe company. An insurance agency. I even worked for Sears Roebuck once."

"Who was your first sweetheart?"

"I don't remember."

"What do you mean, you don't remember? Everybody remembers their first sweetheart."

"Baby," said Joe, "I'm thirty-three years old."

"And I'm twenty-four. You're not so much older."

I'm fifty years older, Joe thought.

"What was she like, that first girl?" Pat went on.

Joe remembered: "*Keep away from Janice,*" *her father had said to him.* "*Keep away from her or I'll break your neck.*"

"Janice," he said aloud. "Her name was Janice."

"How long is it since you've been home?"

He was suddenly startled.

"Quite a while," he said cautiously. Her next words gave him the reason for the caution. "We'll go there. St. Louis isn't so far. I want to meet your family. How about it — next week-end?"

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"Can't," he said quickly.

"The week after."

"I can't take the time from work."

"Bosh. Mr. Wagoner'll let you off. He's a good scout. He likes you. I'll ask him if you want."

CHAPTER TEN

THIS IS THE KIND of man Joe Springer was. This is the kind of life he led in those days before he fled the Main Stem and came to Falcon City.

There were better days, there were poorer days. Day in day out, this was an average day. There had been . . . twelve years of such days.

The sun awakened Joe and for a moment or two he lay still, regarding the cracked, sooty paint of the ceiling above. It had been a dark tan to begin with and now, after seven or eight years without new paint to conceal its grimness, it was a dark brown, where it was not streaked or cracked.

Another day to be lived. He threw back the torn bed covers and swung his feet to the floor and he sat there in his shorts, his chest bare.

There was no closet in the room, only a row of hooks behind the bed. On this hung Joe Springer's two pairs of trousers, a neat pair of oxford grey and a dun-colored pair of lighter weight. Both pairs of trousers hung upside down from a special kind of trousers hanger. Patented spring clips were attached to the creases of the trouser legs, to keep the press sharp and neat, during the night for the one pair, until they were worn, for the spare pair. Another hanger contained Joe's jacket, a very nice jacket of dark worsted that looked exactly like one of the jackets you saw in the windows of Brooks Brothers on Madison Avenue. Joe, however, had bought it on West 42nd for precisely one-fourth of what a jacket that looked exactly like this would have cost on Madison Avenue.

The chest of drawers contained Joe's shirts, two Hawaiian shirts, one blue, button-down collar shirt, two white, with frayed collars and cuffs. Also his socks and his other pair of shorts. Two handkerchiefs.

His shoes, neat black loafers, stood beside the bed. Joe worked his feet into the shoes as he stood up beside the bed.

He got down his oxford grey trousers, put them on, then, his chest still bare, he stepped to the door. He listened carefully for a moment, then slipped back the bolt quietly and peered out into the hallway. It was empty and he slipped out of his room and strode swiftly to the bathroom at the

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end of the hall.

He rubbed his hand over his cheeks and chin and shook his head. He needed a shave. But not now. Now he had to wash quickly and quietly, and he did. Finished, he dried himself upon a half-wet towel that another roomer, or the landlady had hung over the bathtub.

Taking a ten-cent comb from his pocket, he ran it through his dark hair. His ablutions performed, he opened the bathroom door and stepped out into the hall, just as Mrs. Kilkenny, the landlady, came up from the floor below.

"Mr. Springer, 'tis you," Mrs. Kilkenny said. "I was lookin' for a word with you this morning . . ."

"A fine morning it is, Mrs. Kilkenny," Joe Springer said, with hearty cheerfulness. "No rain for two days and that means that the track at Belmont ought to be lightning fast . . ."

"The devil with the track at Belmont," said Mrs. Kilkenny firmly. "It's the rent money I'm after. I'm needin' it to pay my own rent, which was due yesterday."

"I didn't pay you this week, Mrs. Kilkenny?" Joe asked.

"This week, or the last, which you know very well, Mr. Springer. And it's the money I must be havin', or the room."

"Two weeks I owe you? You're sure?"

"Seven dollars and fifty cents. And I must have the money now."

"Why, certainly, Mrs. Kilkenny," said Joe Springer cheerfully. He thrust his right hand into his trousers pocket, frowned lightly, then said, "Oh," and pointed toward his room. "Just a moment."

He stepped past Mrs. Kilkenny, went into his room and closed the door. Quickly he took a shirt out of a drawer, a Hawaiian shirt, since his ties were not in good shape lately. Without bothering to button it he pulled it on, then drawing a deep breath, opened the door and faced Mrs. Kilkenny, his left hand searching his inside breast pocket.

"Can you beat it?" he asked indignantly. "I forgot all about last night. I was having dinner at Lindy's with Mr. — Mr. Slattery, you know, Slattery, the horse man. I paid the check for three and I'm clean." A hollow laugh. "It's embarrassing, Mrs. Kilkenny, but I just don't have seven-fifty on me right now . . ."

"The money or the room," cried the landlady. "I've heard your stories all I'm going to, and —"

"*Toola Rose* will get your rent — and more. Ought to go to the post eighteen-twenty to one. Put your two dollars on it, Mrs. Kilkenny, and tonight you'll thank me . . ."

"I'll thank you for the rent. That's all I want from you, Mr. Springer . . ."

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"That, too, you'll get tonight. I promise you. Big Jake owes me fifty and I'll put the arm on him, if nothing else comes up. You'll have the seven-fifty. Tonight, Mrs. Kilkenny. My word of honor . . ."

"Tonight," said Mrs. Kilkenny firmly. "Or you don't sleep in my house . . ."

It was a standoff and Springer hurried down the stairs and out into Fifty-Eighth Street. He was hungry, lord, he was hungry. It had been a meager day the day before.

He searched his trousers pocket, came up with a thin dime. Walking briskly to Broadway, he stopped for a moment. He looked downtown. The Automat at 46th would be crowded, since it was almost twelve, but they were getting too fussy there and he had been in it twice the day before. Better wait for the 46th Street until evening. He turned left and after a couple of blocks, entered the Columbus Circle Cafeteria.

Inside the door he whisked the check out of the machine and then joined the throngs at the windowed slots. He got a tray, silverware and a napkin. A glass of water and an empty glass. He waited in line at the tea window and casually scooped up a half dozen of the little pieces of lemon that they kept in a bowl.

He stepped out of the line for a moment and got a coffee cup. He worked the milk lever beside the coffee slot, got three quick shots of milk into his coffee cup.

He drifted toward the steam tables, waited until several people got ahead of him and began shouting their orders at the overworked attendants. Then he reached between two customers and appropriated a little oblong of cellophane, which contained crackers that were given with the soup orders.

That was about as much as he could do until he found a good table. He moved easily in and out among the tables, found a four-place one with two stenographers. One was on the plumpish side and was probably on a diet. Without looking at them, Joe pulled out the chair across from the thinner of the two girls.

Coolly he squeezed his half dozen bits of lemon into the water, added the twisted peels. He took the sugar shaker and added a good four tablespoonsful of sugar.

Still without looking at the girls, he reached for the ketchup bottle and knocked about half a cupful of ketchup into his coffee cup. Stripping the cellophane from the crackers he crunched them and filled his coffee cup to the brim.

He worked the mess with a spoon, while the two stenographers who had fallen silent as he sat down at their table, shot furtive glances at him.

He began eating the thick mixture of crackers, ketchup and milk. Out of

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the corner of his eye he watched the plate across the table on which reposed three quarters of a hard roll. The girls began gathering up their purses.

"I better get back to the office," one of them said. "The boss wants to go out at twelve-thirty . . ."

They rose from the table and Joe Springer reached calmly across and appropriated the three quarters of the hard roll.

It wasn't too bad a breakfast-lunch. A glass of nicely sweetened lemonade, a thick soup and most of a roll. He finished the food, took his unpunched check out of his pocket and walked to the cashier. Appropriating a toothpick, he looked the cashier squarely in the eye and said: "I didn't eat."

A scratch today. He *had* to make a scratch today.

At the corner of Fifty-ninth a man with a 16-mm motion picture camera was taking pictures of the pigeons, which were so tame that they would eat out of your hand if you had peanuts or other food to tempt them.

"Sure are tame," Joe remarked to the picture-taker.

"They wouldn't be this tame at home," was the reply. "Dogs get after them, kids shoot them."

"Kids are monsters," said Joe cheerfully. "Why, I remember the time back in Missouri when I came home with three pigeons myself. We had pigeon pie for supper that night, but I ate it standing up." Grinning, Joe rubbed his posterior reminiscently. "Look like a Missouri man yourself," he added.

"Indiana," said the man with the motion picture camera. "Little town near Terre Haute."

"Terre Haute?" exclaimed Joe. "Say, I got kin livin' in Terre Haute. On my mother's side. Folsom, maybe you know them. Jeb Folsoms."

"No-no, you misunderstood me, I didn't say I came from Terre Haute. Little place near Terre Haute. Ain't hardly on the map. Clarksburg . . ."

"Doggonit," Joe went on, "I've heard Cousin Jeb tell about Clarksburg. He don't live there himself, but he's always a-talkin' about Clarksburg. Yeah, come to think of it now, that's where he said he's going to move, soon's he retires. He's in some kinda business in Terre Haute, but gosh, I can't recollect just now what it is. Big store, right on main street, dry goods or hardware. Maybe furniture. Bon Ton Store, something like that . . ."

"Mmm," said the pigeon-photographer. "The name's familiar, but I don't rightly know the place. Nope, can't say that I do. Terre Haute's a pretty big place, a right-smart big place."

"That it is," agreed Joe, "lot bigger'n my own home town. Come to New York to see the sights?"

"Convention," said the man from near Terre Haute, Indiana. "I got a

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little insurance business in Clarksburg and —"

"Yeah, brother!" chortled Joe Springer. "Convention! That means you're here for a rootin'-tootin' old time." He winked. "Got yourself a nice girl lined up already, I'll bet? Brother, I've been to conventions myself . . . I know just what you mean."

"I'm a married man," said the cameraman, "I — I ain't much with the ladies . . ."

Joe looked over his shoulder, stepped closer to the man and said in a hoarse whisper, "Fella gave me a card last week. You want action, here's a place you can get it . . ." Quickly Joe took a card from his pocket, also a stub of a pencil. "The card don't mean nothin', that's just a front, Dixie Trail Dance Hall . . ."

He stopped, for the man from near Terre Haute, Indiana, was regarding him with the look of a man watching a rabbit chasing a fox.

"I just remembered," the man said. "We're having a roll call at the convention hall at one o'clock. I've got to be there . . ."

The man was gone then. The pigeons were still there, but the man who had taken a hundred feet of motion picture film of Columbus Circle pigeons was beating a hasty retreat.

"I've got to make a scratch today," Joe said desperately. "I've *got* to make a scratch . . ."

That was the kind of life Joe Springer had led, on the greatest street in the world. On the Main Stem. That was the kind of man Joe Springer had been before he came to Falcon City, Michigan, Population, 6213.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT WAS AFTER MIDNIGHT when Joe climbed the third floor steps in the Faulkner Hotel and went to his room. He unlocked the door and switched on the light.

The dress was gone.

But they hadn't closed the window. Joe pushed it down, pulled the shade and finally looked at the bed.

The covers were peeled back. Yes, she'd lain in it, all right.

"Damn," Joe said aloud. "Why'd she have to come here?"

Angrily, he undressed and went into the bathroom. He took a hot shower and towelled himself, then got his pajamas.

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They hadn't changed the sheets. They changed them only once a week at the Faulkner Hotel. He snapped out the lights, climbed into bed and pulled up the covers.

His bare right foot touched crumpled paper shoved way down to the foot of the bed. He switched on the lights again, threw back the covers all the way.

It was a folded, crumpled envelope, a soiled envelope, soiled from much handling.

It was addressed to *Mrs. George Woodson, Route 2, Grayling, Michigan.* There was a return address on the back: *Nell Woodson, Templar Apartments, Falcon City, Mich.*

The postmark on the front of the envelope contained the date of Nell Woodson's death.

Joe stared at the envelope. He had no right to open it, read the contents. A letter from a girl now dead, written to her mother, now dead. Yet he had found the letter in his bed, pushed down under the covers, where even a careful search would not have found it. Only Joe, who slept in the bed, would have been likely to find it. That might have been Mrs. Woodson's intention.

He extracted the two sheets of cheap ruled paper. The handwriting on them was clear, but childish. Joe read:

Dear Mom:

I'm in trouble. It isn't what you think, I'm not going to have a baby. It's worse than that. You might not think there was anything worse, but there is.

There *is* a man. A policeman. We were going to be married. That's what he always said, anyway. But I found out that he didn't want that at all. Not marriage.

He's a rat. I know that now. But there's another man I've met since who's everything the other one isn't. I've been out with him only once and he never even made a pass at me. And I practically threw myself at him.

He's got a real important job with a newspaper. I've got a date with him tonight. Maybe he can help me out of this trouble I'm in. I hope so, because I'm scared. Really scared. I don't want to scare you but I'm so scared myself I hardly know what to do. If Joe Webster can't help me I don't know what to do.

They're going to kill me if I don't do what they want me to do. They said so

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and they mean it. They're regular gangsters from New York. But it isn't just the gangsters. They just get paid. It's the people who hired the gangsters. I heard something I shouldn't have heard and that's why they're after me. I'm afraid to write more about it, but if anything happens to me I want you to know their names — the people that are responsible. Here they are:

Harrison (he runs a nightclub)
Latimer (he's the chief of police)
Mickey Carver (he's my former boy-friend, the policeman)

There's somebody else, too, but I don't know his name. Mickey always called him the boss.

Love,

Nell

Joe refolded the letter and put it back into the envelope. Then he sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at the worn carpeting on the floor.

The phone on the stand beside the bed suddenly shrilled and sent a shock through Joe. He reached for the instrument, hesitated a moment, then took the receiver off the hook.

"Joe!" exclaimed the voice of Wagoner. "I just heard what happened. Are you all right?"

"Yes," replied Joe. "I'm all right."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"Well, you don't sound, uh, right."

Joe hesitated. "I'd like to see you, Mr. Wagoner."

"Now? It's after one."

"Something's come up — something I've got to show you."

"All right, I'll come right over . . ."

"No," Joe said quickly. "I'll meet you at the office."

"Good."

Joe hung up the receiver and dressed quickly. He left the hotel and crossing the street walked rapidly to the offices of the Falcon City *Times*.

The place was dark, but he had to wait only a minute or two. The headlights of a car swung around the corner and Wagoner's Cadillac pulled up to the curb. Wagoner jumped out.

He scrutinized Joe sharply as he bore down on him.

"You do look all right," he said in relief as he unlocked the door.

"They were working up to it, but the sheriff came in and spoiled their fun."

"That damn Latimer!" snapped Wagoner. "I've got a good notion to start cracking down on him."

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"I've got the ammunition," Joe said.

By that time they were inside, striding to Wagoner's private office. The publisher switched on the lights. Joe handed him Nell Woodson's letter.

Wagoner looked at the return address, then extracted the contents of the envelope. He read swiftly, turned to page two. Joe watched him, saw shock jolt him.

"This names them!"

"Will it stand up in court? A letter from a dead person naming her murderers."

"I don't know, Joe. I don't know."

"Mr. Wagoner," Joe said, "you were at the Twilight Club tonight. You saw what goes on. A place like the Twilight Club couldn't operate without the sanction of the law."

"I know that. But gambling's one thing. This —" He flicked Nell Woodson's letter at Joe. "This is something else. In a great many small communities, they'll wink at gambling. If the people want it, the prosecuting attorney and the local authorities sometimes ignore it. After all, they're politicians and they want to be good fellows."

"All politicians want to be good fellows. They need votes to keep them in office. Votes cost money, so . . ." Joe shrugged.

Wagoner regarded Joe steadily for a moment, then glanced down at the letter in his hand. "Joe," he said slowly, "I've been so engrossed in my personal problems ever since coming to Falcon City that I haven't had time to really size up the town. You know it better than I do. Just what *is* the score?"

"That's it, in the letter. Harrison's moved in with a mob. Not just into Falcon City. The county. He's got it in his fist and he's squeezing it. But Harrison's just the front man. He can't operate without protection." He indicated Nell Woodson's letter in Wagoner's hand.

"You mean Chief Latimer?"

"Latimer's the chief of police of one little town. Actually he has no jurisdiction over Harrison's Twilight Club, which is outside the town limits. That means Harrison's protection is bigger than that . . . the one Mickey Carver referred to as The Boss."

"Who?"

"You want me to make a guess?"

"It would only be a guess?" Wagoner winced. "No — don't guess. I'd only get to worrying. I — I want to think about this a while."

"All right, Mr. Wagoner."

"I can't believe it," declared Wagoner. "I just can't. This letter . . ."

". . . was written by a girl who was scared stiff. It was mailed just a few

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hours before — before she was murdered. I never believed that accident story for one minute. She had a hundred dollar bill in her purse. Somebody slipped it to her at the Twilight Club."

"Who? . . . Why. . . ?"

"I don't know. I was with her and she went into the ladies' room. She came out . . . and met somebody in the club. Not in the casino. Whoever it was, gave her the hundred. She started back to Falcon City . . . and was killed."

"She was alone. You'll never prove anything . . ."

"How do we know she was alone? Maybe somebody was with her. Maybe somebody killed her in the car, put the car into gear . . . and jumped out."

"You're letting your imagination run wild."

"I'll let it run wilder. Mrs. Woodson didn't jump from my hotel room. She was shoved out."

"If I didn't know you, Joe . . ." Wagoner shook his head in bewilderment. "Such things just don't happen."

"They happen all the time, Mr. Wagoner. Gambling is big business. Dice, slot machines, horses. Even a county as small as this brings in a lot of revenue. Enough for Harrison to bring in a couple of New York musclemen. And that's only this county. Perhaps Harrison controls other counties. . . ."

Wagoner banged his desk with the palm of his hand. "That's that! Tear up the letter. Forget that you ever saw it."

"The letter's in *your* hands."

"*You* tear it up!" Wagoner thrust the letter at Joe, but the latter refused to take it.

"I work for you, Mr. Wagoner. You're my boss."

"Yes. And I'm also the publisher of the Falcon City *Times*. A stinking little rag in a stinking backwater town in Michigan. This isn't New York and my paper isn't the New York *Times*. I'm no reformer. I haven't got any burning desire to start a crusade. I'm trying to make a living, that's all."

"Mr. Wagoner," Joe said. "I came to this town a month ago with twenty-one cents in my pocket, wearing a shirt I'd worn for nine days. You didn't ask me any questions. You gave me a job . . . a job that meant . . . you'll never know how much it meant to me."

"You made good on the job. And you dragged me out of a hole. We're even."

"Not quite. This — this was more than a job to me. It was . . . a chance. A second chance."

"Cut out the noble stuff," snarled Wagoner. He suddenly threw Nell

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Woodson's letter to the floor. "Damn it, damn it, damn it!" He smacked his right fist into the palm of his left hand. "Why'd you have to show me that letter?"

"I didn't know what to do with it. A month ago I'd have known," said Joe evenly. "In my other life."

Wagoner cocked his head to one side, looked at Joe through narrowed lids. "Every now and then you get mystical on me. What's this about your other life?"

"Do you want to know about it? What I did before I came to Falcon City?"

"You didn't kill anyone, did you?" Then, as Joe shook his head: "That's all I want to know."

Wagoner exhaled wearily. "Let's sleep on it."

They left the newspaper office and Joe crossed the street and walked the short distance to the Faulkner Hotel. The lobby was deserted except for the night clerk and Flip Fogarty who sat in a leather chair facing the front door.

He grinned lazily at Joe. "Out pretty late for a burg like this."

"I take long walks in the country," Joe replied coldly.

Fogarty chuckled. "Whaddya hear from the mob, Joe?"

"I'm not on the mob's mailing list."

"I mean the boys on Times Square."

"We've covered that."

"No, Joe, we didn't. On account of I couldn't quite place you at the time."

Cold fingers seemed to clutch at Joe's vitals. He said: "It's past my bedtime."

"The shank of the evening. Harrison wants to see you."

"I don't want to see Harrison."

"He says he'd like to talk to you . . . about Big Jake."

"I'm not interested."

"Don't be a sucker. Joe Springer knows his way around."

"My name is Joe Webster."

"Maybe it is, but it was Springer in New York." Fogarty got up and stretched. "Let's take a little ride."

"No."

Fogarty sighed. "Why do it the hard way, Joe?"

"I'm not going to see Harrison tonight."

"He won't like it."

Joe walked past Fogarty to the stairs. Fogarty watched him climb out of sight, then shrugged and left the lobby.

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Joe reached the third floor and put the key into the door of his room. It was dark inside, but the moment he pushed open the door he smelled cigarette smoke. A tremor ran through him. Then a voice in the darkened room said, "It's all right, Webster."

Joe found the light switch beside the door and flicked it on. Sheriff Cooley sat in the armchair beside the open window. Joe closed the door and stood with his back to it.

"Understand you found something here in the room — something you had to show Wagoner."

"You tap the telephones?" Joe asked.

The sheriff shook his head. "This isn't New York, Joe. The telephone operators get lonesome, especially at night. And the night operator happens to be a cousin of mine. Which just happens to be a good thing for you."

"It's good for me that she told you about a phone conversation I had with Mr. Wagoner?"

"Maybe that, but it's a good thing she told me about a phone call someone made to New York this evening. To a Mr. Jake Moriarty."

Joe crossed to the bed and seated himself on it. "So?"

"I do a lot of reading. I know about Big Jake Moriarty. The Grand Jury in New York questioned him about the killing of a man named Rosen. They had to let him go because the only witness had disappeared . . . a man named Joe Springer."

"You think I'm Joe Springer?"

The sheriff shrugged. "You're Joe Webster — you said so yourself. But if Joe Springer were around here, I think he'd be in for a bit of trouble."

"From who?"

"Joe Springer'd know that better than I would." The sheriff got up. "What was it you had to show Carl Wagoner at one o'clock in the morning? Something you found here after Mrs. Woodson was pushed out of the window?"

"You said pushed."

"Did I? I guess I made a mistake. I should have said *jumped*."

"Pushed is the right word."

"You've got proof of that?"

Joe frowned. "I might have — tomorrow."

The sheriff nodded. "Bring it to me — tomorrow. Or did you mean today?"

"Today."

The sheriff gave Joe a half salute and went out. Joe shot the bolt on his door. He undressed and went to bed.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

JOE ENTERED THE OFFICES of the Falcon City *Times* shortly after eight o'clock the next morning. Ginny signaled to him. "Mr. Wagoner wants to see you." Her face was serious.

Joe entered the publisher's office and closed the door. Wagoner's desk was clean and he sat back in his big chair where he had undoubtedly been sitting for some time.

He said: "Joe, I didn't get much sleep."

"Neither did I."

Wagoner made an impatient gesture. "I've come to a decision. I'm not a crusader."

"Yes?"

Wagoner frowned. "What I'm trying to say, Joe, is — that letter you showed me last night . . . tear it up."

"Someone's talked to you since we were here last night."

"That's beside the point. I've got money invested in the *Times*, in this town. As a publisher, I can *make* money. As a crusader, I can't."

"Mr. Wagoner," Joe said slowly. "I think you've heard about Joe Springer. I want to tell you what kind of a man he was."

"You don't have to."

"I'd like to though. This Joe Springer was, as they say in New York, 'one of the boys.' He was sharp. He knew all the angles, all the answers and all the questions. He eked out a living, if you can call it that, by steering suckers to Big Jake's crap game, by a little touting, by this-and-that. He was strictly small-time. He got on the wrong track and he was a long way down it. And then, one day, something happened — something he had no right to expect. A new start. . . . Mr. Wagoner," Joe said, "you gave me the new start. You can take it away. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to tear up that letter."

"And then?"

"It's up to you."

"You want me to quit?"

Wagoner hesitated, his face showing anguish. "Take a — a vacation. Just a couple of weeks. I — I think I can square things by that time so you can come back." Joe nodded and Wagoner emitted a groan. "I haven't forgotten what you've done for me. You — you've given me as much of a new

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start as you say I've given you. I think it'll work out. I — I hope so."

"Goodbye, Mr. Wagoner . . . and thanks!"

Wagoner got to his feet, to hold out his hand to Joe, but the latter was already going out of the office. A tremor wracked the big body of the publisher.

Jennings, the editor and Harwood, the advertising man, were in the outer office as Joe came out of the publisher's office, but he walked to the door without looking to the right or left. He was not even aware of Ginny's call to him.

Outside, he walked to the hotel and climbed to his room. The door was partially open and Chief Latimer and Mickey Carver were inside. They had pulled out the drawers of the bureau, had the bed stripped down to the mattress and were on their knees peeling back the carpeting.

Joe stood in the open doorway. "It's not there!"

The chief of police got to his feet. "Where is it?"

Joe shook his head.

The chief said nastily: "I want that letter from the Woodson girl."

Mickey Carver got up from the floor. His mouth was cracked in a wicked grin. "The chips are down, Springer."

"You won't find the letter," Joe said tonelessly. "But you've got nothing to worry about. I just told Mr. Wagoner I'd destroy the letter."

"*I'll* destroy it," snapped Latimer. "It's nothing but a pack of lies anyway."

"Is it?"

"The chief asked you nice," Mickey Carver said. "You can give him the letter, nice, or you can give it to him after I get through with you. *I'd* rather work you over first. I think you know that."

"You wouldn't get the letter," Joe said doggedly, "not unless I wanted to give it to you."

"You New York bums think you're tough, don't you?" sneered Carver. He wiped his moist palms on the thighs of his legs and stepped forward. Chief Latimer held up his hand.

"For the last time, Springer, give it to me. . . ."

"I won't give it to you," Joe said. "I told Mr. Wagoner I'd tear it up, that's all. However, if that doesn't satisfy you, suppose I gave it to Sheriff Cooley."

"No!" howled the chief.

"What if I tore it up in front of the sheriff? Would you take *his* word for it that it was destroyed?"

"You cheap New York hood," gritted the chief of police. "You've caused enough trouble since you've hit this town. Mickey, search him."

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"We can do a better job at the station," Mickey Carver said hopefully. "It's got to be on him — it's a cinch it ain't in this room. We've searched everywhere."

"All right, Springer," Chief Latimer snapped. "Come along."

Chuckling, Mickey Carver produced a pair of handcuffs.

Joe winced. "You won't need those."

"I know I won't," chortled Mickey. "In fact, I'd like nothing better than for you to make a run for it. But I think you'll look better walking through the lobby with these on your mitts. You been riding high and wide in this town, but you're through. Hold out your hands."

Joe shot a quick look at the chief, but the latter was already going through the door. Drawing a deep breath, Joe held out his hands. Mickey clicked the manacles tight over his wrists, then gave him a violent shove toward the door.

"Move, bum!"

They descended the stairs and walked through the lobby, so the desk clerk, the manager and several townspeople could see Joe wearing the manacles. At the side of the hotel, Joe got into the chief's car. The chief climbed in beside him and Mickey got in behind the wheel. Two minutes later they got out at the courthouse and went into the chief's office.

There, Mickey Carver removed the handcuffs.

"Strip," he ordered.

"Can I make a phone call?" Joe asked.

Mickey Carver, snarling, grabbed the back of Joe's coat collar and in one violent jerk, peeled off the coat. "I said strip!"

Joe slipped off his trousers, stooped and took off his shoes. "The rest of it!" Carver ordered.

Joe took off his shirt and Mickey gestured to his shorts. Joe took them off. Mickey, holding the shorts at arm's length, examined them perfunctorily, feeling mostly around the waistband.

He tossed them aside and went through the shirt, feeling the seams. He finished with it and attacked the trousers, turning them inside out, searching the pockets, feeling the seams over and over. He worried the cuffs, but finally threw the trousers aside. The chief, meanwhile, was searching the coat. He went over every inch of it.

"Not here!"

Mickey scooped up Joe's socks, turned them inside out, then attacked the shoes, even pulling out the inner sole and examining the heels and soles, for possible recent repair work. Finally the chief and Mickey looked at each other.

"We've missed it," said Mickey.

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Whirling, he leaped at Joe and hit him a savage blow in the face. "Where is it?" he screamed.

The blow sent Joe reeling, but he recovered and spread his bare feet apart, the better to take a second blow. But the chief stepped between him and Carver.

"Not now, Mickey, not now. We've got to find the letter." He caught up Joe's coat again, went through it a second time. Mickey, almost slobbering, went through the rest of Joe's clothes a second time. Finally he threw down the last article.

"It's not here."

"D'you suppose it could be at the office?" Latimer asked.

Mickey frowned, then shook his head. "He took it back with him at one-thirty in the morning."

"It isn't at the newspaper office, it isn't here, so . . ." Latimer came to a sudden decision. "We've got to go over that hotel room again . . ."

Carver groaned. "I even unrolled the toilet paper."

"It's a big place and we missed it," said Latimer. "Come on." Then he looked at Joe and gestured. "Get your stuff . . ."

He unlocked the door that led to the cells in the rear of the station. Joe gathered up his clothes, followed the chief. The cell block consisted of a wide corridor with two cells on each side. An elderly man who looked like a hobo sat in one of the cells. He hooted as the chief and Joe, in the nude, came along.

"Hey — what's this? A strip tease?"

Sourly the chief unlocked the far left-hand cell. Joe went into it and the chief locked the door, then left the cell block, slamming the outer door.

Joe sat down on the bare boards that were supposed to be a bunk and pulled on his right sock. Then he cautiously lifted his left foot and ran his palm over the sole to make sure that the letter he had fastened there with cellulose tape was still secure. He put on his sock and completed dressing. Before he was completed, the door to the cell block opened and Sheriff Cooley came in carrying the keys the chief had apparently left in his office.

Joe stepped up to the door. The sheriff unlocked it and gestured for Joe to follow. They went past the vagrant in the opposite cell and entered the chief's office.

"You wouldn't take the advice I gave you last night?" the sheriff asked then.

"What advice?"

"That you leave town. It's too late for that now. Latimer knows about the letter."

"Who told him?"

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The sheriff grimaced. "My position hasn't changed. I'm still not giving out information."

"Can you tell me just one thing? Where do I stand right now?"

"You don't."

"Then why'd you let me out?"

"I didn't." Deliberately the sheriff tossed Chief Latimer's keys onto the chief's desk. "I don't know how you got out."

Joe gestured toward the cell block. "There's a witness back there."

"A hobo!"

"I can go?"

"*I'm* not stopping you."

Joe nodded. "Thanks." He started for the door and then the sheriff said: "They didn't find the letter?"

Joe stopped. "They went back to the hotel to make another search."

"That's what I thought. Is it there?"

Joe hesitated and made the final decision. "Are you the man behind Latimer?"

The sheriff laughed harshly. "Goodbye, Joe Springer!"

Joe went through the door and down the shaded walk to the side street. Fifty yards away, Bingo sat in his ancient taxi. Joe went up to him.

"Can you give me a ride?"

"No," said Bingo, "I can't. Believe it or not, I've got a wife and two kids." He shook his head. "Walk. Walk east of town and lay low somewhere, a mile or two out. I'll be along in about an hour."

"Thanks."

Joe retraced his steps, went back past the courthouse and circled the block behind the courthouse. He went south a block, then cut down a street with only a house or two on it, eastward. He made another detour south and reached a country road. The road led southwest, but he followed it over a low knoll. He looked back, saw no on in sight and, climbing a fence, cut across a field. A half mile away he reached a dirt road that ran due east.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JOE SPRINGER WAS lying on the ground in a wheat field some fifty yards from the road when he heard the distant chugging of a laboring automobile. He rose cautiously to his knees and saw Bingo's taxicab coming along.

Rising quickly, he strode to the edge of the road. The cab screeched to a

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dusty stop and Joe entered quickly.

"I almost didn't make it," Bingo said over his shoulder as he sent his cab roaring along the dusty road. "The chief himself came and told me not to pick you up if you showed up."

"How'd you make it then?"

"I always go to the airport at nine-ten. The chief was there and he saw me pick up two passengers and start for Harrison's. In fact, he followed me about halfway, but then he turned back. So when I dropped the fares at the Twilight Club, I continued on south instead of turning back to town. That's why I'm late. I had to drive eight-ten miles out of the way."

"These two fares you drove out to the Twilight Club," Joe said, frowning. "What did they look like?"

"Like they was cellmates of those New York hoods of Harrison's. But I want to tell you somethin' else. Pat Bryce — she talked to me before the chief did. She wants you to call her."

"At her home?"

"Either there, or at the factory. I — I can't take you too far. I ought to be showin' myself right now."

"How much time can you take?"

Bingo scowled at his cheap wrist watch. "None, but there's a crossroads up here about three miles. They got a telephone there, only I've got to drop you before we get there because they know me and I don't want to stop."

"I understand, Bingo. I appreciate your taking the chances you have. Here —" He thrust a crumpled twenty dollar bill at the cab driver.

Bingo refused to take the money. "This one's on the house. Mister, I don't know from nothin'." He added hastily, "And I don't want to know! All I can say is — don't let them catch you!"

"That plane you met at the airport," Joe persisted. "It came from the east?"

"Lansing. Two-engine job. The east planes drop people at Lansing, then they get on this two-engine job."

"How far is Lansing from here?"

"Ninety-some miles." Bingo shot a look over his shoulder. "Lansing might be a good place for you to head to . . . if you can make it."

He took his foot off the gas. "I'm going to slow down now. Don't wait for me to stop all the way."

Joe put his hand on the door. "Thanks, Bingo!"

"Good luck . . ." Joe swung open the door and Bingo said, under his breath, "You'll need it . . ."

Joe hit the gravelled road running. He ran a half dozen steps, then pitched headlong into the shallow ditch at the side of the road which was cushioned

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with a thick growth of weeds. He raised himself on his elbows and looked toward the crossroads a quarter of a mile away.

He saw the dust cloud that almost enveloped Bingo's taxi, saw it move to the crossroads and turn south. He waited a good five minutes, then picked himself up and brushed off his clothes. He took his time about it, then began walking toward the crossroads.

As he approached he made out that the huddle of buildings consisted of a gas station, a small store, an unpainted frame house behind the store and two or three outbuildings. A sign over the gas station read: *Horton's Corners,*

A man wearing coveralls was repairing a tire as Joe strolled up to the gas station.

"How're you?" Joe greeted the man.

The man nodded. "Hot day, ain't she?" He sized up Joe. "Hikin'?"

"I guess I took the wrong road," Joe said. "How far am I from Falcon City?"

"Five miles, but you're headin' wrong."

"You mean I ought to go that way?" asked Joe, pointing in the direction he had just come.

"That's the right direction, but the wrong road. Here — go north a half mile, you hit the blacktop. Follow that to Number 92-B, then turn left. Take you right into Falcon City."

"Have you got a map?"

The man left his tire repair work. "Right inside." He went into the gas station and stepped up to a road map stuck to the wall with cellulose tape. "We're off the main drag here, you know," he said, "but here's where you are right now. Go north like this to 101-A, then left to 92-B. You ought to be able to get a ride when you hit 101-A."

Joe noted the wall telephone. "Mind if I use the phone?"

"It takes a dime. For Falcon City I mean. If you're calling farther . . ."

"No — just Falcon City."

Joe took a dime and stepped to the phone. He hesitated and the gas station man stepped through the door and returned to his tire repair work.

Joe took the receiver off the hook, dropped the dime into the slot and dialed the operator.

"Falcon City," said the operator into his ear.

"The Fred Bryce home, please," Joe said, thinking of what the sheriff had told him the night before about the operators listening in on the phone conversations.

The phone whirred and then Pat Bryce's voice said: "Hello?"

"Don't mention my name," Joe said quickly. He heard Pat gasp, but her voice was controlled as she said: "Where are you?"

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"Highway 92-B, eight miles out of town. East."

"Wait there — I'll pick you up." Pat hung up the phone.

Joe hung up the receiver and stepped out of the gas station. "Thanks, Mister." He pointed north. "The blacktop's a half mile, you say?"

"That's right, a half mile."

Joe started up the north road. He walked about two hundred yards, then the road made a slight turn to the right. Joe looked over his shoulder and saw that by walking on the far right side of the road he was out of sight of the gas station at Horton's Corners, although he could still see the crossroads.

He walked a few yards further, then turned abruptly off the road into a patch of white birch. He ran swiftly through the thinned-out trees until he could see through the edge of them, the cluster of buildings at Horton's Corners.

Remaining within the protection of the trees, he ran quickly a hundred yards to the east, then bending low, headed out across a rough clearing back to the gravelled road. At the edge of the road, he hesitated, then bent still lower, scurried across the road into a pasture in which there were clumps of shrubs spotted here and there. Taking advantage of the protection of the shrubs, he darted back toward the rear of the buildings at Horton's Corners.

Taking advantage of all cover, he moved through a rotting log fence to a woodpile less than thirty yards behind the gas station. He dropped flat behind the woodpile and was grateful that he had not seen a dog at the gas station.

He had only a few minutes to wait. His ears first picked up a low whining which increased to a subdued rumble and finally became the noise of a fast-driven car. Then he risked a quick peek around the edge of the woodpile.

Chief Latimer's green and white police car whipped across the crossroads and came to a screeching halt in front of the gas station.

Joe could clearly hear Chief Latimer's shout: "There was a man here ten minutes ago, which way did he go?"

Joe could not see the gas station attendant point, but he heard him say: ". . . blacktop . . ." Then the Ford roared and the police car was off.

Joe remained behind the woodpile. Three minutes later he heard the whine of a second car and looking over the parapet in front of him, Joe saw that it was a bigger car this time. He edged forward a few inches behind the woodpile so that he could see around it. The gas pumps partially blocked his view, but he had a clear view of the space between the pumps and the door of the gas station.

A moment later a black Cadillac was braked to a stop between the pumps and the door. Joe made a note of the license number — 8 T 98–63. A Michi-

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gan license. There were two men in the front seat, but Joe could not see their faces clearly, as the station attendant stepped between him and the car.

He could, however, hear the conversation. "We're looking for a stickup man," one of the men in the car said. "About thirty-five, five-ten . . . thin face, sharp looking . . ."

"Why, that must be the man Chief Latimer asked about," the attendant replied.

"Chief Latimer?" one of the men asked sharply. "Who's he?"

"Chief of police in Falcon City. He was here only five minutes ago . . ."

"Which way'd he go?"

"I told him the man'd gone that way . . . Say, what's this all about . . . ?"

The men in the car did not reply. The car was backed swiftly a few yards and then shot forward. Joe, risking a bold look at that moment, had a quick glance at the face of the man sitting on the right of the driver.

Dan Regan.

He was not surprised. Regan wasn't a regular associate of Big Jake Moriarty, but he could be hired for a job if the price was right. And Big Jake thought Joe Springer warranted paying the price.

The man with Regan was probably Ike Macdougal who was, three times out of five, questioned by the New York police when Dan Regan was questioned.

This was costing Big Jake Moriarty important money. It would have been cheaper in the first place to hire Regan and Macdougal to take care of Lou Rosen. But Big Jake had made a mistake and a man had to pay for his mistakes.

They would be back. Chief Latimer and Mickey Carver and Dan Regan and Ike Macdougal. Carefully, Joe gathered together several blocks of wood and set them up so that they would conceal his head and shoulders if he moved forward from behind the main woodpile. He did, however, leave cracks between the blocks so that he could peer through them.

It was ten minutes before Joe heard the high whining of the police car, and then, a moment later, the roar of it as it churned up before the gas station. Both Latimer and Carver got out of the car this time.

"Look here, Horton," Mickey Carver snarled. "You gave us a bum steer."

"No, I didn't," cried Horton. "Honest — I told you the truth. I saw him leave here and start down the road to the blacktop."

"He didn't reach it," snapped Latimer. "Les Peters, on the corner, says he'd have seen him."

"I don't know about that, Chief," Horton said earnestly. "All I can say is

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that I saw him heading down the road. In fact, I watched him until he was out of sight. But say, there was another car here asking about him — right after you left. Big black Cadillac . . ."

Chief Latimer and Carver exchanged glances. "Harrison's imported trigger men."

Latimer nodded. "We saw the car." He jabbed his forefinger against the gas station man's chest. "We're going to look for him between here and the blacktop. If he comes back, hold him here . . ."

"How?"

"Haven't you got a gun?"

"Just a shotgun . . ."

"Get it."

"When'll you be back?" Horton asked nervously.

"We're going to make a good search this time," said Latimer. "I don't know just when we'll be back. But if he returns, you hold him."

"Yeah, but — should I call the sheriff?"

"Why?" demanded Latimer bluntly.

"Well, I dunno, I — seems to me I heard that the sheriff's the boss outside of Falcon City . . ."

"I'm telling you," snarled Latimer. "Keep him here — and keep your mouth shut."

"In other words, *we're* running this," added Mickey Carver. "Not the sheriff."

They got back into the car and again it roared off. Joe, peering through the crack between two blocks of wood, saw Horton running to his house.

He reappeared a moment or two later carrying a shotgun and accompanied by a heavy-set woman, apparently his wife.

"It ain't any of your business," she was complaining.

"We got to do what they tell us," her husband rejoined doggedly.

"The chief of police hasn't got any jurisdiction out here."

"I'm telling you what they told me," Horton persisted. "If he comes back, hold him . . ."

"He's a murderer from New York," complained Horton's wife. "I tell you I heard it on the radio only fifteen minutes ago. He's got a gun . . ."

"So've I." Horton had reached the gas station and was about to set the gun inside the door, then thought better of it. He cradled it over his left arm and began to pace back and forth, like a sentry.

His wife stood for a moment, watching him, then whirled back toward her house with a parting shot. "You'll be sorry, mark my words!"

Joe's eyes followed the wife of the gas station man. An aged Chevrolet stood near the house. Joe regarded it thoughtfully.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TWENTY MINUTES PASSED, then the black Cadillac returned. Horton had set down his shotgun while serving the farm truck, but when he saw the Cadillac coming, he caught it up. Joe winced and hoped that the man would not be too rash with Dan Regan and Ike Macdougal.

Both men climbed out of the sedan, but maintained a wary distance from Horton. Ike Macdougal kept his hand in his right coat pocket.

"This fella we asked you about," said Regan, the spokesman for the two. "Has he come back this way?"

"Not so's you could notice," responded Horton, patting the stock of his shotgun. "The chief of police told me to keep a lookout for him."

"The cop-car prowling around," said Macdougal, "that's the chief of police?"

"Yep, he's looking for this New York feller, too."

The two New Yorkers exchanged looks, then Regan asked: "You got a phone here?"

"Right inside." Regan stepped into the gas station and dropped a coin into the telephone. "The Twilight Club, sister," he said into the telephone, then a moment later: "Flip? Regan. Lemme talk to Harrison." He paused a moment, then said: "Regan here. Look, we got the guy bottled up, but the chief of police — that's right — he's buzzin' around here in a squad car. . . . Wait a minute!"

Letting the receiver dangle at the length of the cord, he stepped to the doorway. "What do you call this place?" he asked of the gas station man.

"Horton's Corners."

Regan stepped back inside the station and picked up the receiver. "Horton's Corners, the scissorsbill tells me . . . I think we'd better wait here. Just so there won't be no trouble. Step on it!"

He replaced the receiver on the hook and went outside. He caught Macdougal's eye, nodded, then said to Horton: "Got any cold drinks in the store there?"

"Mister, I got just about everything. Beer . . ."

"Never touch the stuff," said Regan striding toward the store.

The three men went into the store. They had hardly entered than Joe again heard the whining of the police car as it approached. The car slackened speed as it reached the crossroads and Latimer and Carver saw the Cadillac

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before the gas station. They apparently recognized the car, but proceeded forward at a slower speed. They pulled up in front of the gas station and Carver's police revolver was in his hand as he got out from behind the wheel. Latimer also climbed out of the Ford and looked nervously toward the store.

The door of the store opened and Dan Regan stepped out.

"You a friend of Harrison's?" Latimer called quickly.

"That's his car," replied Regan, "and I didn't steal it."

Ike Macdougal came out behind Regan, his right hand in his pocket. Mickey Carver saw that and did not like it.

"Take your hand out of your pocket," he ordered, "and bring it out, empty."

Regan held up both hands, palm outwards. "Look, Captain," he said placatingly, "Let's not have any trouble. I just telephoned Harrison and he's on his way out here."

"Where's Bud Horton?" demanded Latimer.

Horton came out of the store without the shotgun. "I — I'm all right," he said nervously. "These men — these gentlemen just had a — a Coke."

His revolver held before him, Mickey Carver walked around Chief Latimer toward the men from New York.

"I always wanted to meet a couple of Big Town hotshots," he said nastily.

"Mickey!" warned Latimer. "Keep your mouth shut."

"Yeah," said Ike Macdougal, "button your lip."

Carver sized up Macdougal. "You don't look so tough to me."

"Me — tough?" asked Macdougal with mock innocence. "Did I *say* I was tough?"

"We got a law here about carrying concealed weapons," Mickey went on belligerently. "If that's a gun in your pocket . . ."

"Shut up!" howled Chief Latimer. "You heard him say that Harrison was on the way out here . . ."

"That's right, he oughta be here any minute," said Dan Regan. He gestured to Bud Horton. "Mister, I think your wife or somebody wants you in the house."

"Beat it," snapped Chief Latimer.

Horton did not have to be asked twice. He turned and ran toward the house behind the store. Regan waited until he thought Horton was out of earshot, then he faced Latimer.

"We're both looking for the same man — Joe Springer."

"We haven't found him," growled Latimer.

"He was here a half hour, forty minutes ago."

"I've got a man on the telephone switchboard in town," said Latimer.

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"Springer put in a call from here. We were here in seven minutes flat from the time he put in the call. He could just about have reached the paved road a half mile away, but he didn't reach it. . . ." He suddenly stopped. "How did you happen to come here?"

Regan shrugged. "Luck, I guess." He looked to the north. "There're some woods over that way."

"Hardly enough to count," growled Latimer. "We'll go through them."

"Ike and me ain't much on the woods stuff," said Regan.

Joe Springer, behind the woodpile, caught the humming of an approaching car, but looking westward down the dirt road, saw nothing. He shifted his eyes eastward. A car rounded the slight turn in the road and bore down swiftly toward the crossroads.

"Here's Harrison," Regan announced.

The car was a green Cadillac coupe, a car that Joe Springer knew. Pat Bryce was behind the wheel. She pulled across the road and brought the coupe to a screeching stop behind Chief Latimer's car.

"Holy smoke!" cried Chief Latimer. He gave Regan and Macdougal a quick look, then ran toward the coupe, just as Pat Bryce started to climb out of it. He spoke earnestly in a hoarse whisper. Joe was unable to make out the words, but then Pat spoke, sharply and clearly.

"I won't stand for it. If you hurt him, you'll have me to answer to."

"Miss Bryce," pleaded Chief Latimer, "go home. Take my word for it. This is no place for you. These men —"

"I know their kind," snapped Pat, "and I'm telling you again. If something happens to Joe Webster, I'll hold you responsible . . ."

"All right, Miss Bryce, all right," said the chief desperately. "Only go now — go home. Please. . . !"

Mickey Carver risked turning his back on the New Yorkers and strode up beside Pat Bryce. "What's the matter, Miss Bryce?" he taunted. "You afraid your boy friend's going to get himself hurt?"

Pat Bryce gave him a look of utter contempt.

"Be quiet, Mickey!" cried Latimer. "I'm telling you for the last time, be quiet . . ."

"I don't feel like being quiet," retorted Mickey Carver. "I been takin' your orders long enough. We're in this equal and from here on . . ."

Chief Latimer struck Mickey in the mouth with the back of his hand. It was a hard blow and Mickey put his fingers to his lips and looked at them when he brought them away.

"That's going to cost you, Jeff," he said ominously.

"Don't spoil everything," cried Latimer. "We ain't licked yet. We can pull this out. But you can't go making trouble when it ain't necessary.

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We're in enough trouble right now and . . ." He broke off, looking toward the west road. A cloud of dust was approaching rapidly.

"Here comes Harrison!"

"I'll leave you men to fight it out," snapped Pat Bryce getting back into her coupe. She started the motor, then leaned out. "Remember what I told you . . ."

She backed the car, shot it forward and across the crossroads, up the north-bound road toward the blacktop.

"What I'd like to do to her!" sneered Mickey Carver.

Latimer moved quickly away from Carver, out toward the road. When Harrison's car stopped, he was at the tonneau door instantly, talking quickly, excitedly.

Mickey and the two New Yorkers moved over to Harrison's car.

The car was some fifty feet farther from Joe Springer's hiding place and he could catch only snatches of the conversation, but he quickly guessed the intent of the talk, when Alf Perkins and Flip Fogarty climbed out of Harrison's car and Harrison himself got behind the wheel.

Perkins, Fogarty and the two New Yorkers moved toward the Cadillac which also belonged to Harrison. They all got into the car and headed up the north road, driving slowly. Mickey Carver and Chief Latimer held an animated conversation in their car before they, too, started northward in the wake of the car containing the four gangsters.

Both cars disappeared around the turn in the road.

Bud Horton ventured tentatively out of the house. He started for the store and was about a dozen yards from it when Joe Springer got to his knees.

Horton was less than ten feet from the door of the store when he heard Joe's pounding feet behind him. He stopped, let out a yelp and made a jump. Joe leaped past him into the half-opened door of the store.

It was a small country store, filled with a conglomeration of merchandise, but Joe had eyes for only one object — the shotgun. He expected it to be somewhere in the open, near the door . . . and it was. That won him the game.

The shotgun was leaning against the wall, just inside the door. Joe caught it up, whirled and thrust the muzzle toward the door just as Horton bounded up.

Horton bleated and tried to back away. "Come in!" ordered Joe.

Horton shot a desperate look toward his house, but apparently his wife had not come out after him. He swallowed with difficulty, shuffled forward and whined.

"D-don't shoot, Mister . . . I . . . I didn't do nothin' to you."

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"And you're not going to," said Joe. "Are the keys in your car?"

"Y-yes. Never take them out. "Y-you want the car?"

"I'm going to take it. Oh, don't worry, you'll get it back before tomorrow. I'm not going to damage the car, not if I can help it. But I'm not going to have you go yelping the minute I pull off. Understand?"

"Yeah, sure, anything you say. I — I don't want no trouble."

"You've got a telephone in the gas station," Joe said. "And I guess you've got one in the house, too . . ."

"Same phone, just a — an extension. I — I won't call anyone. I promise."

"Don't bother promising," Joe said cynically. "You'll break the promise before I'm even out of sight."

Joe raised the shotgun and the gas station man cried out. Joe shook his head and broke the breech of the shotgun. He took out two shells and put them into his pocket. "Here," he said, handing the man the gun, "I suppose you've got some more shells around, but you won't be able to reload in time."

He half saluted Horton and stepped to the door. He drew a deep breath and stepped out. A quick glance to the right showed him a clear north road.

He ran to the gas station man's battered old Chevrolet, saw that the key was in the ignition and climbed in behind the wheel. The motor caught instantly and he tooled the car past the gas station and turned it into the east-bound gravelled road.

He pressed down heavily on the gas pedal and the little car tore along the loosely gravelled road. It was a matter of minutes now, he knew. The gas station man was already at the phone. He couldn't get the chief of police in Falcon City because the chief was a half mile from Horton's Corners without a phone.

The sheriff, then.

Or perhaps he would take off afoot to find the chief. A half mile. Five minutes, six . . . another minute or two before they would be back at the crossroads.

The speedometer registered forty-five, fifty. It quivered but would go no higher.

It wasn't necessary. Ahead was a crossroad, a dirt road rather than a gravelled one. Joe braked, whipped to the right and again gave the Chevrolet all the gas it could stand.

A mile, another half mile and he saw a ribbon of black ahead. He turned right on it, the tires of the Chevrolet screeching. A signpost said: *Falcon City, 6 miles.*

In a hundred yards he had the speedometer up to fifty-five, then sixty.

Sixty-five . . . Sixty-eight. A slow moving truck loomed up ahead and

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he whipped the car around it, gasping as he saw a car rushing toward him. He cleared the truck, again sent the old Chevrolet hurtling down the macadam road.

A signpost said: *Falcon City, 2 miles.*

Houses began to appear on both sides of the road. He passed another car, found one still ahead of him and a car coming toward him. He was compelled to brake.

It was fortunate that he slackened speed, for he would have missed the little crossroad otherwise. It was a winding dirt road that saw very little traffic. Joe turned into it, found himself driving down what was more of a lane than a road. He slackened his speed to thirty miles an hour, twenty.

He passed a tar-paper shack on the right, continued on for another quarter mile and deliberately ran the car off the road into a clump of stunted tamarack trees. Out of sight of the road he turned off the ignition.

They would find the car, no doubt, but not very soon.

He got out and took his bearings. If he had not lost his sense of direction, Falcon City was a mile or a mile and a half due west. Chief Latimer and Mickey Carver and possibly Harrison's entire crew of trigger men were now roaring along somewhere east of Horton's Corners.

In that direction lay safety for Joe Springer. So they would reason.

The sheriff? The sheriff was probably now reaching Horton's Corners. He would possibly take off after Latimer and the others. Or . . . he might return to Falcon City. He was the one uncertain man in Joe Springer's calculations.

Joe Springer shook his head and walked carefully back to the little winding road off which he had driven Bud Horton's Chevrolet. He crossed it and cut through a two or three acre patch of poplars, coming out upon a small hillside that was apparently used as a pasture for a half dozen Holstein cows.

He crested the hilltop and a tremor ran through him. Ahead was a smooth macadam road. It wound through a gate to a fine stone residence . . . the home of Congressman Fred Bryce. He had spent an evening here . . . how long ago was it? Two days? Two years!

Then, even as Joe Springer stood on the hilltop looking down at the imposing home of the congressman, a green Cadillac coupe came whipping along the macadam road and went through the gate. It stopped before the house and Pat Bryce got out and ran in.

Joe started down the hillside, walking swiftly across the rough field. He reached the road, climbed a rustic log fence and stepped out upon the macadam road.

A hundred yards more and he was in sanctuary.

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They did not see him from inside the house. He rang the doorbell and waited like any ordinary caller. When the door was opened, Joe found himself facing a middle-aged woman, the housekeeper.

"Miss Bryce," Joe said.

"Who is calling?"

"Joe Springer . . ."

"Joe Spring . . ." That was as far as the housekeeper got. Then she gasped and whirling, ran into the house. Joe followed her into the wide hall.

"Miss Pat!" cried the housekeeper. "Miss Pat, he's here . . . !"

Pat Bryce came running from the big living room into the hall. Then she was rushing toward him, into his arms.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THEY WERE IN the den, five minutes later, when Pat Bryce finally stopped sobbing and pulled away from Joe.

"I look a mess. Wait . . . !"

She got up from the sofa, hurried into a powder room. When she came out five minutes later, she was once more the composed, certain young woman Joe Springer had known so briefly, yet so well.

Her hair was combed out, she had applied fresh lipstick and a trace of color to her cheeks.

She came across the room and sat down beside Joe. "Now," she said, "we'll talk. None of this would have happened if you'd told me the whole story, even last night."

"I tried to tell you yesterday — I wasn't worth it."

"Don't talk like that!" cried Pat Bryce furiously. "You make me so mad. We can work it out."

"What's there to work out?"

"You found a letter from that — that girl. What's . . . in the letter?"

"Some names."

"What names?"

"Mickey Carver . . . and Chief of Police Latimer."

"What's so terrible about that?"

"Well, the letter says that the girl'd been threatened and if anything happened to her, Carver and Latimer would be to blame. It also accuses them of being crooks."

"Policemen are being called crooks all the time."

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"Murderers, too?"

"A letter isn't proof."

"It comes awfully close to being proof, especially if the person who wrote it and named the people who had threatened her *is* then murdered."

"Nell Woodson wasn't murdered."

"Who says she wasn't — Chief of Police Latimer? The man accused of murdering her?"

Pat Bryce frowned. "You have a point there. But . . ." Her face showed sudden petulance. "All this because of a *waitress!*" She looked squarely into Joe's eyes. "Have you told me the truth about your relationship with her?"

"I told you," Joe said wearily, "that I was thirty-three years old and — that I've been around."

"I could choke you for that!" cried Pat furiously.

"*You* haven't lived in a convent up until now," Joe reminded her.

Pat winced. "Don't do that, Joe. Let's not start fighting with each other. This — this other problem is much more important. Chief Latimer wants to —"

"He wants to kill me. And so do Big Jake Moriarty's trigger men."

"I don't understand that New York stuff. You . . . you were a witness or something?"

"I saw Big Jake dump a dead man out of his car — a man with a bullet in him."

"But *you* didn't do it! You were merely an innocent bystander. All you had to do was tell the truth —"

"And wind up in a barrel of cement in the Hudson River."

Pat's face showed displeasure. "You make it sound so — so sordid."

"It's that kind of a business. You were out at Horton's Corners an hour ago . . ."

"What?"

"I was there . . ."

"Where?"

"Hiding. I saw you come up and I heard you talking to Chief Latimer. I also heard Latimer and the New York boys talking — and Latimer and Harrison who came out right after you left."

"You were there all that time and nobody knew it?"

"Horton knew — afterwards. I took his car to get away from there, while Latimer and Harrison's four boys were searching for me between Horton's Corners and the blacktop road."

Pat stared at Joe in astonishment. "What — what did I say to Chief Latimer?"

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"You said you'd hold him responsible if I was hurt."

"And I meant that, Joe. Father has enough influence in this county to — to get Chief Latimer fired. He's still a congressman and a congressman is a lot more important than the chief of police of one small town."

"How about a sheriff?"

"Cooley? What . . . do you mean?"

"How important is he in this county?"

"I don't know what you mean — he's the sheriff."

"Yet he lets Latimer run all around the county. He lets him take graft from Harrison . . ."

Pat exclaimed, "Joe, that's your big fault. You — you sound off too much. That's why you've gotten all these people down on you — why you lost your job and —" She stopped and shook her head. "Mrs. Wagoner came to see me this morning. That's how I — I knew. She likes you, Joe, and she had a terrible fight with her husband over you. She called him ungrateful, after what you'd done for him these last few weeks . . ."

"His security was threatened. I've been thinking about that. I was in much the same position as Wagoner only a short time ago. I *had* no security. The next day or the next week never bothered me much. Then I came here and found security. At least I thought I had. Losing that security is a lot worse than never having had it. Wagoner was in the same spot. He had no security before I came — before his paper picked up — but now he's had it. He can't lose it. I don't blame him."

"Well, his wife blames him. And I think she'll win him over. In fact, I *know* she will. You can go back to the newspaper anytime you want, if *that's* what you want."

"Yesterday," Joe said slowly, "I wanted that more than anything in the world. Today . . . well, it doesn't seem to matter anymore. I just want to stay alive . . ."

The phone, on a coffee table less than three feet from Pat, suddenly shrilled. Pat gave a violent start, but reached instinctively for the instrument.

"Yes?" Her face showed dismay and she covered the mouthpiece. "It's Sheriff Cooley. He wants to know if I — if I've seen you."

"Tell him to come over."

"No, Joe!" whispered Pat. "He mustn't — he mustn't know you're here . . ."

Joe whisked the phone from her hand. "Come on over, sheriff," he said and hung up.

"Now, quick, Joe," exclaimed Pat. "I don't think you should have done that, but since you did — we've got to figure out what to tell him."

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"Why?"

"You said yourself that he was under the domination of Chief of Police Latimer!"

"I didn't say he was — I *asked* if he was."

"That's the same thing!" Pat cried. Suddenly she gripped Joe's arm. "That letter — just what did it say? Did it — did it name anyone else besides Latimer and this, what's his name, Carver?"

"It said there was a man behind them — a man they called the boss."

"Sheriff Cooley?"

"It didn't name him."

"Where is the letter? Did Latimer get it from you?"

"If he had, I wouldn't be here right now."

"You've still got it. That — that letter may be your bargaining instrument. The sheriff mustn't have it . . . give it to me, Joe!"

"I can't."

"You've hidden it . . . where? At your hotel . . . ?"

"They tore my room to pieces."

"Where, then? Where . . . ?" She suddenly sprang to her feet. "Don't you trust *me?*"

The door chimes bonged in the next room. An automobile horn blasted out in front of the house.

"Company," said Joe getting to his feet. Pat gave him a reproachful look and started for the door to the living room which, in turn, led to the hall door.

"Pat?" called the voice of Congressman Bryce.

"Dad!" called back Pat Bryce. "In the den . . ."

Bryce came into the room. With him was Sheriff Cooley. For the first time since he had known him, Joe noted that the sheriff wore a revolver openly in a holster hung from a broad belt.

"We bumped into each other coming in," said the sheriff easily.

Congressman Bryce's eyes fixed on Joe Springer. "Well, Springer or Webster, you've got some explaining to do."

"Maybe we've all got some explaining to do," said the sheriff. "Who'll start off?"

Congressman Bryce turned deliberately from Joe and looked steadily at the sheriff. "Sheriff, as you may have heard, I have a personal interest in this young man." He smiled indulgently. "Pat seems to have taken a fancy to him."

"A cheap New York chiseler." The sheriff made it a casual statement of fact, without rancor.

"Who can tell what a girl sees in a man?" asked Bryce smoothly. "How-

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ever, I don't concur with you, Sheriff. Joe Webster —"

"Springer," corrected the sheriff.

"Springer. Springer's been here to dinner. His employer speaks very well of him. I believe the young man has a promising future. He may have gotten on the wrong track . . ."

"What track's that, Mr. Bryce?" asked Joe.

Pat moved back to Joe's side and, standing beside him, gripped his hand. "Dad, you're right. We can settle this among ourselves."

"Quite," agreed the congressman. "That's what I was about to suggest to the sheriff."

The sheriff looked inquiringly at Joe. "Well?"

"Congressman," Joe said slowly, "can you send Chief of Police Latimer to jail? Can you get Harrison's gunsels off my neck?"

"Oh, come now, boy," exclaimed Bryce. "It's not as bad as all that. I've always found Latimer a reasonable enough man."

"Have you, Congressman?" asked Sheriff Cooley.

"Look here, Cooley. You know as well as I do that there's an election in just a little while. I don't have to draw you a picture."

"No sir, you don't." The sheriff regarded Joe steadily. "What'll it be, Springer? The good life . . . a beautiful girl, a fine job, plenty of the green stuff that makes the world go round, or . . . ?"

"Or what?"

"A ticket on the Lansing plane which leaves in exactly thirty-three minutes."

"Now listen, Cooley," blustered Bryce. "I think I've had just about enough . . ."

Cooley raised his voice for the first time since entering the room. "Make up your mind, Joe!"

"Don't," whispered Pat. Joe felt the tremor that ran through her body down to the hand that gripped his own tightly. He took his hand out of hers gently.

"A seat on the plane for the letter. Is that the deal, Sheriff?"

"That's it, Springer!"

"Joe," said Congressman Bryce with forced warmth. "Let's sit down and talk this over. I'm sure we can work things out —"

"Don't be a fool," Pat Bryce pleaded. "You know how I feel about you . . ."

"Yes," said Joe Springer quietly. "I know how you feel about me. And I know how *I* feel about you."

"That's more like it, boy!" enthused the congressman. "I knew you'd be sensible. Why throw away a future for —?"

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"I'm sorry, Congressman," Joe interrupted. "Pat, I'm going to have some bad days . . . and nights . . ."

"Don't have them! I love you, Joe . . ."

"I love you, Pat. I guess . . ."

"Twenty-eight minutes to make the plane!" cried out the sheriff.

The congressman's face was white. He pointed dramatically at the sheriff. "If you walk out of this house with him, you're through, Cooley. I'll crucify you!"

"With the letter from a dead woman which names her murderers . . . Carver . . . Latimer . . . Bryce?"

"That's a lie!" cried Bryce hoarsely.

"Is it? You've seen the letter?"

"Springer," said Bryce like a man clutching at the last straw. "Name your price."

"A plane ticket to New York . . ."

"Twenty-seven minutes," said the sheriff, starting for the door. Joe followed him. He expected to hear Pat call after him. She didn't. He followed the sheriff out of the house to the sheriff's sedan, a Buick, with the word SHERIFF lettered on the door in big white letters.

"The airport's four miles the other side of town," the sheriff said as he got behind the wheel. "It's going to be close."

Joe started to get in beside him, but the sheriff shook his head. "In back. There's a shotgun there. We may need it."

Joe got in behind the sheriff. A short shotgun was lying on the floor at his feet. The sheriff started the car, backed and sent it past the cars of the congressman and his daughter, clipping part of the lawn beside the driveway.

A moment later the car was on the macadam road.

"I've got to go through town," the sheriff called over his shoulder. "The other road's too long. Keep down . . ."

Joe Springer slumped low in the seat.

The sheriff's car hurtled along a winding macadam road, reached a straight road that led to the heart of Falcon City, a half mile away. The speed of the car slackened very little as it hit the concrete city street.

They drove two blocks and then the sheriff made a sharp left turn into Falcon City's main street. "You've got the letter?" he asked then as he was forced to slow up.

"Yes, but it doesn't mention Bryce by name."

"It doesn't have to. *I* know that Bryce is the man behind Latimer."

"It took me a long time to figure it out," said Joe. "He's a rich man . . ."

"Is he? His business has lost money every year for the past five years. Without his cut from the rackets — from this county and five other coun-

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ties — he'd have to shut up his shop. It's not so hard for a successful business man to get elected to an office, but it's awfully hard for a *bankrupt* business man . . . Damn . . . ! He reached Latimer!"

They were shooting past the street bordering the courthouse. The chief's car, red headlights blazing, was moving toward Main Street, idling until the occupants saw the sheriff's car whipping past the intersection.

The sheriff jammed down on the gas accelerator and the Buick roared with renewed life. "Grab up the gun, Springer," the sheriff yelled. "You knew you might have to face this when you made the decision."

Joe caught up the shotgun. It was a sawed-off shotgun, apparently Sheriff Cooley's version of a riot gun. It had two barrels and two loads of shells.

The whine of Chief Latimer's siren split the air, rose to a wailing shriek. A bullet whacked into the rear of the Buick.

"Hang on!" cried Sheriff Cooley.

The glass of the rear window shattered, showering Joe with tiny splinters of glass.

"Shoot, Joe!"

Joe raised the muzzle of the riot gun, thrust it through the shattered glass. He raised his head to peer out, saw that the pursuing Ford was less than a hundred feet behind them.

He pulled the forward trigger. The shotgun jarred his shoulder. The pursuing car swerved wildly for an instant, then the tires caught the road again and it came on as steadily as before. It seemed to gain even.

"It didn't do any damage," Joe exclaimed over his shoulder.

The sheriff groaned. "Damn those scatterguns. They're no good for any distance. I'll let them get closer."

Another bullet from the police car tore through the shattered glass, showering Joe with further splinters. He cocked the second barrel of the shotgun.

"They're gaining . . . !"

"All right, get ready . . ."

Joe ducked down for a moment. He felt a bullet jar into the rear of the Buick, then raised himself up. The Ford was less than fifty feet behind the Buick.

Quickly he raised the shotgun, thrust it out and pulled the trigger. He had a quick glimpse of the windshield of the Ford as it disintegrated . . . and then the Ford was skewering wildly on the highway.

Joe watched it make almost a complete turn before it left the road and plowed through a ditch and into a steep bank of earth.

He turned to face the front. "All right," he said.

"It isn't all right," said the sheriff grimly. "Look ahead . . . !"

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A quarter mile ahead, on the right, was the drive leading in to the Twilight Club. In front of the driveway, blocking the road, was a black sedan.

"The New York boys," said the sheriff. "And the shotgun's empty. Here — take my revolver. I'll need both hands to drive . . ."

"Wait a minute, this is a twelve-gauge shotgun." Joe thrust his hand into his pocket, brought out the two shells he had extracted from the gun of the gas station man at Horton's Corners. "I've got two twelve-gauge shells I took from Bud Horton's gun."

"Load!"

Joe broke the shotgun, extracted the two empty shells and slipped in the fresh ones.

"Hang on," the sheriff warned. "It looks like I'm going to have to go off the road to pass them . . ."

Joe rolled the window down on his right, leaned forward. The black Cadillac was a hundred yards ahead, blocking most of the highway. It was going to be a close call to dart around to the left of it, hit the shoulder, then regain the pavement.

"All right!" howled the sheriff. Joe cocked both hammers of the double barreled shotgun.

A bullet shattered the windshield of the Buick, but the sheriff did not even falter. He gripped the wheel of the car tightly, braked only a trifle, then swung the car to the left — and to the right.

At exactly the precise instant that he swerved the car, Joe thrust the shotgun out of the side window and pulled both triggers.

It was a hundred yards before the sheriff battled the Buick back onto the pavement. Then Joe looked through the broken rear window.

"They won't be following," he said.

Eight minutes later, the sheriff brought the car to a stop at the Falcon City airport. It was a mean little airport, consisting of a single strip of concrete runway, a small hangar and a shack that was a combination office, waiting room and lunch room.

Joe Springer had replaced his sock and shoe and as they climbed out of the car, he handed the sheriff the letter Nell Woodson had written to her mother.

The sheriff nodded. "You'll be all right in Lansing and I'll telephone the D.A. in New York to have him meet your plane at LaGuardia airfield."

The door of the lunch room office was opened and a man wearing an apron waved to Sheriff Cooley. "Sheriff, there's a phone call for you."

Cooley and Joe exchanged looks. Cooley went into the shack, but Joe stepped outside. Two minutes later, Cooley emerged. "It was Pat Bryce. Her father's shot himself." He nodded. "I guess that's the best way . . ."

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"You'll want me back here, won't you?" asked Joe.

The sheriff hesitated, then shook his head. "Everybody in town knows that Latimer was taking graft from Harrison." He shrugged. "So they had a falling out — crooks always do. Harrison brought in some trigger men from New York and they shot it out with Latimer and Carver. That's the way I'm going to give out the story. . . . Here's your ticket, they're ready to pull out."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE SUMMER PASSED, then autumn and winter and once again it was spring. Spring in Falcon City. The countryside was green, the trees along Main Street were in full leaf and the town looked peaceful and quiet as Joe Springer parked his car on Main Street some fifty feet from the front of the Falcon City *Times* Building.

He sat for a moment regarding the windows of the furniture store directly ahead of him. The windows had not been washed for some time and a faded poster still stood up leaning against the glass on the far right. It was a gaudy poster reading: *Cooley For Congress.*

A man came between Joe Springer and the poster in the window. He peered through the windshield at Joe, then called out.

"Hey, Joe — Joe Webster!"

He came to the car and thrust out his hand. "I'm Harwood," he said. "Remember?"

"Of course," replied Joe. "We used to work together on the *Times.*"

"I was your boss," chuckled Harwood, "for about one day. Then you were *my* boss. We've been talking about you quite a lot, Jennings and me. They gave you a kind of a rough time back there in New York, didn't they? But they finally sent that gangster, Moriarty, to Sing Sing. Let's see, he's about due to burn, isn't he?"

"Next week," said Joe, "unless he gets a stay of execution."

"We sure had some excitement here last year, didn't we?" Harwood went on. "Guess you know about the sheriff running for Congress — and making it."

"He stopped off in New York on his way to Washington, right after Christmas," said Joe. "He'll make a good congressman . . ."

"He sure will," enthused Harwood. He looked over his shoulder at the front of the building housing the *Times.* "Heard about the *Times?* It's for sale. Business has gone way down — below what it was when you first came

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on the job. Wagoner's in hock to the bank and if he doesn't sell within the next month or two, they're going to close down on him."

"That'll put you out of a job," Joe said.

"Are you kidding?" Harwood took a folded newspaper from his pocket and proudly handed it to Joe. "Take a look at that."

The paper consisted of sixteen pages and was called the Falcon City *Star*. "A new paper?" Joe asked.

"Since last September." Harwood tapped his chest. "Publisher. Jennings is editor. It's only a weekly, but we carry more business in the one weekly issue than Wagoner has in his six daily issues. That's the trouble with the old *Times* now — we're murdering it." He chuckled. "We're working for ourselves now. There's a difference, you know . . ." Then his face showed sudden fear. "You're not . . . coming back to work on the *Times?*"

"No," said Joe, shaking his head. "I'm on my way to St. Louis. Just thought I'd stop by and see . . . well, some people . . ."

"Sure," said Harwood. "Yeah, sure. It wouldn't be Pat Bryce, would it? She's announced her engagement to Kinsella. You know, the fellow runs the bank."

"That's fine. She's had a pretty bad time lately, I imagine."

"Not so's you'd notice. Oh, sure, her father's business is in the courts, but what with Kinsella she's got nothing to worry about."

"Excuse me," said Joe suddenly. "There's someone I want to see." He opened the door of the car, got out. Harwood, turning, saw Ginny, the bookkeeper of the Falcon City *Times* coming toward them.

"Ginny?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Joe. "Ginny . . ." He nodded to Harwood and went to meet Ginny.

THE END

If you've enjoyed Frank Gruber's newest book as much as we suspect you have, you may very well want to have it in your library in a more permanent form. Rinehart and Company will be publishing it in hard covers soon — in an expanded form. Watch for it at your bookstore.

Also, look for the next issue of Mercury Mystery Book-Magazine. It features the original novel, "Red Scarf," by Gil Brewer — an exciting tale of murder and brooding violence set against the sun-lit skies of a Florida motel.

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MYSTERY PUZZLE: Murder on the Lake

SHERIFF NEWMAN THROTTLED DOWN the outboard as they approached the point. "That's Stony Point straight ahead, he said. "Go around it to the left, eastward, and you're in Little Frenchman's Bay. Nice bass along the rocks in the mouth, though there's none in the Bay itself, where Walters' cabin is — the only one in there."

Inspector Goldsmith nodded, and thought regretfully of the fishing he was missing.

"Walters and his wife Cora live there year 'round," the Sheriff went on. "Lived, I should say. I doubt Cora will stay on — she never was real happy about being so far from town." He pointed off to the right. "Down on the far shore, at the opposite end of the lake, is The Landing. There's a store and some camps there."

The sun was just dipping behind the big pines where the Sheriff was pointing, and the scarlet-and-golden-streaked sky was like no city horizon. Inspector Goldsmith was rudely brought back to the present by the renewed roar of the outboard. In a matter of moments they were around Stony Point and in the mouth of Little Frenchman's Bay, where Cora, a guide named Luke, and a Deputy waited on the shore. Nearby lay the blanket-covered body of Walters.

Inspector Goldsmith first examined the drowned man. There was a long, narrow bruise on the side of his head.

"If it'd been a tenderfoot," the Sheriff said, "I'd a figured he'd lost his balance, cracked his head on the gunwale, and fallen in the water unconscious."

The Inspector nodded thoughtfully, and spoke to the roughly handsome Luke. "You found the body, I hear. When was that?"

" 'Bout an hour ago. I came over from The Landing to try for a bass for dinner. The low sun was in my eyes, and I almost ran into Walters' skiff before I saw it, so I wouldn't have seen him fall out even if it'd just happened. Figured it was funny he'd leave his skiff anchored there, with tackle and all in it, so I dove for him. Found him the second try."

"Do you think he might have slipped and fallen?"

"Might have," Luke said. "He hadn't been getting on so good with Cora, and he had a whiskey bottle in the boat. Might have been drunk."

"That's a lie," Cora flashed. "It's you he wasn't getting on with — he thought you were pestering me. Don't go making out *I* might have had anything to do with this. Last thing he said when he left today was that if you came into the Bay, I was to shoot off the shotgun and he'd come back and fix you good. It's a good thing you didn't come, because I sure would have done it!"

Inspector Goldsmith turned to Sheriff Newman. "I think you were right to doubt that this was an accident. One of these two has definitely lied. Once we discover exactly what that lie is, we should have a clearer picture of what really happened here."

Why did the Inspector say one of the two had lied? What might discovery of the lie reveal? *Solution is on page 110.*

—J. A. KRIPPER

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When Oscar Hartzell hit Chicago, he was straight off an Iowa farm — and looked it. You couldn't help believe he was honest, earnest, and uncomplicated. Two of these adjectives were accurate — he was earnest and uncomplicated in his pursuit of a dishonest million dollars.

THE FABULOUS DRAKE SWINDLE

by W. T. Brannon

WOULD YOU LIKE TO INVEST A FEW dollars and receive a big slice of the world's greatest fortune?

If so, you are fair game for a 300-year-old swindle. It began in England a few years after Sir Francis Drake died aboard his ship off Nombre de Dios on January 28, 1596, later spread to America, and has cropped up regularly in the United States ever since.

The story is simple: The British government confiscated Drake's estate. The famous freebooter's will was tied up in the Ecclesiastical Court and was never probated. There was an illicit affair between Drake and Queen Elizabeth and the government suppressed the will to keep the scandal from coming to light. A vast fortune awaits those who will help the legitimate heirs to force the British to settle.

It is an alluring story that thousands have found easy to believe. But it was a minor racket until the Twentieth Century version was conceived and executed by one of the most fabulous swindlers America has ever produced.

Oscar M. Hartzell was an Iowa farm boy whose parents had to struggle for a living. Oscar quit school early to help on the farm and probably would have stayed there had it not been for a suave stranger who called on his mother one day. He told her the story of the Drake estate and convinced her that she would reap a rich harvest from an investment of ten dollars. She never saw the stranger again nor did she hear any more of the Drake estate.

Oscar, who had been appointed a deputy sheriff, was singularly impressed by the swindler's story. He went to the library in Sioux City and gathered all the information he could find about the British buc-

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caneer. He steeped himself in the lore of the Spanish Main and specifically Sir Francis Drake's quasi-legal plundering of Spanish ships with the blessing of Queen Elizabeth. He followed this by learning all he could about the Virgin Queen.

In the course of his travels around the farming sections near Sioux City, Hartzell talked to others who had been bilked of small sums. What surprised him most was that all the victims confidently expected to realize something from their investment. He realized then that there was a big field, virtually untapped.

Hartzell saved his money and went to Chicago, where he did more research and frequented the haunts of shady gentry. Eventually, he met two kindred souls, Sudie B. Whitaker and Milo F. Lewis. Both were accomplished city slickers and their first impulse was to brush aside this Iowa farmer who looked as if he'd just come to town with a load of corn.

But they recognized his possibilities and went in with him instead. Early in 1919, the three announced the formation of the Sir Francis Drake Association, whose purpose would be to wrest from the British Crown the illegally suppressed estate of the long-dead buccaneer.

The original plan was to solicit all those whose name was Drake or whose forebears had been named Drake. This in itself was an ambitious project and Hartzell went to Iowa to start organizing the farmers.

He was admirably fitted for the job. A big, heavy-set young man, with tousled brown hair and ruddy cheeks, whose pants were too tight and too short and who still wore high-topped, broad-toed shoes, Hartzell still looked like a farmer and could talk their language. He had a bluff, hearty manner and when he opened a conversation, he was trusted almost immediately. He had acquired none of the attributes of a city man and he certainly didn't look or act like a swindler.

He told his victims that he had located Ernest Drake, then living on a farm in Missouri. He was the sole surviving heir to the Drake fortune and there would be a rich reward for those who contributed to the expense of forcing a settlement. The response to this was so gratifying that Hartzell revised his plans after only a few calls.

Why should donations be limited to only those with Drake connections? Why not divide the great estate into shares and permit anybody, with or without Drake connections, to participate?

This threw the doors wide open to everybody with money. And there was such a rush to get in that Hartzell had to make another quick change of plans. Instead of clipping the victim just once, why not a device that would bring in repeated donations? Investors could buy shares on the budget plan, just as they purchased cars and homes. Participation in the final settlement

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would be in proportion to the contribution. Payments could be small or large and they could be made weekly.

If this thing were handled properly, Hartzell reasoned, it not only could be a gold mine, but it could be prolonged indefinitely.

A tight organization was necessary to accomplish this. Hartzell set up local chapters, each under the direction of a collector, who would issue receipts and make regular remittances to headquarters. To keep up the interest, Hartzell promised to send the latest news of the venture to the collectors, who would relay it to the investors at the weekly meetings.

And while he was about it, Hartzell decided it was just as well to make his promises lavish. The return, he said, would be from $1,000 to $5,000 for every dollar invested. He was vague about the size of the final settlement, but he intimated that the sum was so large that his followers would be unable to comprehend it.

It seems likely that Hartzell himself was unable to understand fully all his claims. For example, if the estate had amounted to as little as $100 and if interest at 6 per cent had been compounded quarterly, the total amount would have exceeded 26 billion dollars.

The Iowa visit was so successful that Hartzell and his partners hired field agents to organize chapters in seven states of the Middle West. The response was phenomenal and the operations were again extended, to four southwestern states. The long range plan contemplated organizing the whole of the United States and Canada, but this never materialized.

Though Lewis and Mrs. Whitaker, the city slickers, were still in the Sir Francis Drake Association, Hartzell, the hayseed, became the dominant figure. From the outset, he ruled his domain with an iron hand. He divided it into twenty-one districts, each in charge of a field agent. The agents made regular rounds of the chapters, gathering what the collectors had taken in.

Hartzell did not demand all the money. He called all his agents together and told them they could keep commissions for themselves. "I want $2500 a week," he told them. "Please see that I receive this amount."

Though the collectors gave receipts to the donators — and these receipts were to determine each investor's share when the settlement was made — Hartzell himself kept no records. He told the agents and collectors to keep their own records.

Having heard of the statutes on using the mails to defraud, Hartzell carefully refrained from writing letters. All contact with his field agents was by wire. He insisted that remittances to him must be made by express.

To keep up the interest in the

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cause, Hartzell sent regular messages, weekly or oftener, to his field agents. These were enthusiastically embellished in bulletins that were sent to the local chapters by the agents.

The fervor of the Drake Association members surprised even Hartzell.

In some cities, no meeting halls could be found large enough to accommodate all the members. An Illinois town had more than 2,000 members; a small city in North Dakota claimed membership of 2,500, including all the members of the Chamber of Commerce.

In one middle western city, a minister was the collector and the stoutest advocate of Hartzell's cause. He told his followers that the British government would oppose the settlement to cover up the scandal of Queen Elizabeth's illegitimate son born of the clandestine affair with Drake. There was no question that he sincerely believed this and in speeches as stirring as any of his sermons, he convinced his listeners.

From the beginning, Hartzell warned his adherents that there would be stiff opposition from officials in both England and the United States. American money lords, he said, would side with British financial interests and would use every available weapon to prevent a settlement. He demanded that every contributor stick to a policy of "silence, secrecy and nondisturbance." No whisper of the campaign to wrest the great fortune from the British must reach the ears of the law. Hartzell threatened to "red-ink" anybody who complained or discussed his proposition with the authorities. He made it clear that anybody who talked would be summarily cut off from participation.

Surprisingly enough, nobody complained and nobody asked questions. And no hint of the swindle reached the post office inspectors for the first three years. Even then, their information was so vague that they had no conception of the magnitude of the scheme; nor were they in possession of any concrete evidence.

Nevertheless, Hartzell was smart enough not to tempt Fate. It might look better to the investors, he reasoned, if he went to England. Mrs. Whitaker and Lewis went with him. He sent back cablegrams describing his efforts to reach the proper British officials, giving details of the intricate legal steps that must precede the settlement. This, of course, would be costly and delay was inevitable. He urged his followers to be patient and warned them again that they must maintain the utmost secrecy.

Early in 1922, Hartzell announced that he had just discovered that Lewis and Mrs. Whitaker were swindlers who had gone into the deal for what they could get out of it. "I came to this country in the company of a bunch of crooks," he asserted. "As long as I associated

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with them, I was classed the same as they were by the officials on both sides of the water."

Both withdrew from the Sir Francis Drake Association and oddly enough, neither retaliated against Hartzell by attempting to expose the scheme.

At the same time, Hartzell denounced Ernest Drake as a fraud who wasn't the real heir as he had claimed to be. But, Hartzell added cheerfully, through painstaking effort, he had located the sole surviving heir, who was then living in England. He had assigned full control of his claim to Hartzell.

Undoubtedly, Hartzell awaited the reaction to these announcements with some trepidation. But nobody asked the questions he expected: Why was there only one heir instead of thousands? Why would a man who stood to become the wealthiest person in history assign his vast claim to a stranger from America?

When nobody questioned him, when his story was accepted without even a raised eyebrow, Hartzell knew that he was firmly entrenched and that his swindle could go on indefinitely. He had only one worry — the United States Post Office Inspectors. If he could keep them stymied, nobody else could touch him.

Hartzell thought he had the answer to this. Continually, almost in every message, he pounded home his edict of silence and secrecy.

The agents who sent him the weekly quota of $2,500 were instructed to remit by American Express. They were specifically forbidden to use the mails. In turn, every communication from Hartzell was by cable. He was never known to have mentioned the Drake campaign in a letter.

He believed that if he never used the mails to receive the money or if he transacted all his business by wire the inspectors would have nothing on him. He apparently didn't know that causing others to write letters and send them by mail was a violation of the statutes.

Rumblings of the big deal reached the post office inspectors, however, and they began a quiet investigation. For a long time, they knew only the broad outlines of the scheme and little else. Hartzell's continuous exhortations to secrecy had had their effect. Without exception, the contributors refused to talk. But they had their own methods of gaining information and, bit by bit, through hard work, the inspectors learned who many of the principal agents in the United States were. These could all have been arrested, but the inspectors' evidence was vague at best. A charge against the principals probably would result in acquittals and this would only spur the promoters. The postal inspection service always has endeavored to obtain sufficient evidence for conviction before causing arrests. The dossier against Hartzell and his

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agents was built up, but the inspectors held off until they had airtight evidence.

During the next ten years, Hartzell, unaware of the investigation, lived in luxury and ease in a pretentious apartment in Basil Street, London. He began acquiring a British accent, emulated British habits, and had his suits cut by the best tailors of Saville Row. He was quickly transformed from an Iowa hayseed to a dapper man-about-town, who attended the latest plays and frequented the more exclusive dining rooms.

Hartzell realized, of course, that it would be necessary to fan the flames of enthusiasm back home through his weekly messages. Nothing could do this so well as reports of progress towards the day of settlement. First, he warned his following that dozens of obstacles lay in his path and that the battle would be arduous. He pointed out that the estate, with its accumulated interest, was so great that the settlement might wreck the Bank of England and that it surely would rock the money structures of the world. There was no question but that it would be opposed bitterly by the international bankers and by financiers everywhere.

But he, Hartzell, would let nothing stand in his way, he assured the contributors. He would carry on, throwing aside one obstacle at a time until he had achieved the goal, even though it took years.

As soon as this had been thoroughly rehashed at the weekly chapter meetings, Hartzell decided it was time to give the faithful something tangible to chew on. He cabled:

"I am going to tell you all something I have never told you before in regard to the amount of the whole affair. If you had all over and above one billion pounds sterling, which is equivalent to five billion dollars, if you had all above that amount, you could buy the whole city of Des Moines and build a fence around it."

Sanguine accounts of progress followed, week by week. He had finally contacted the Prime Minister, who had reluctantly recognized the validity of the claim. But much work remained to be done. The original will of Sir Francis Drake must be dug out of the archives. Then the Herculean task of computing the interest from 1596 would begin. This would require the services of expert mathematicians and nobody could say how long the work would take. The great day was in sight, Hartzell announced. This wonderful news, relayed to the chapters, kept them happy for a long time. At intervals, they were fed choice morsels about the negotiations. And finally, when it appeared that the victims needed a shot in the arm, Hartzell announced that a settlement date had been set.

But the great day failed to materialize. In November, 1927, Hart-

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zell cabled his agents: "Settlement delayed for a month. Estate will be handed over with as much speed as His Majesty can conveniently allow."

This kindled the fires anew and the membership continued to dig cheerfully to feed the flames, even though Hartzell told them he was encountering other delays. This went on for six months and in June, 1928, another message arrived.

"They were going to settle May 29, but one of the principal powers was ill and could not be on duty. The new Lord Chancellor who succeeded Lord Cave had to go thru the papers to complete the deal. The new Lord Chancellor discovered an error which means $1,200,000 to me. Plainly understand it does not make any difference whether it is ten million pounds for me or against me, it has got to be correct, according to the Lord Chancellor's decision."

This fortunate error by the Lord Chancellor served to prolong the negotiations for more than a year. Then, when it appeared that the great day was finally at hand, the stock market crash of 1929 sent the country's economics into a tailspin.

The crash was even more fortunate for Hartzell. He told his followers that word of the impending transfer had leaked out and caused the big crash. It might be months, possibly years, before the deal could be completed, but he would keep on trying.

Events that followed were made to order for Hartzell's purposes and could not have been more nearly perfect if he had designed them himself. The market crash was quickly followed by a world depression that grew worse with each passing month. The downward spiral of prices, the swelling ranks of the unemployed, the growing demand for action in Washington — all these precipitated speeches by Vice President Charles G. Dawes and President Herbert Hoover. Hartzell had only to hint and the speeches were embraced by his followers as veiled opposition to the Drake settlement.

Hartzell's agents told the contributors that Huey Long was one of the main champions of the big battle. His Share-the-wealth, Every-man-a-king program really had reference to the big settlement, the agents claimed.

The postal inspectors had been fully aware of Hartzell's moves. They went into action early in 1931 and on February 28, five of Hartzell's principal agents — Otto G. Yant, Harry Osborne, C. A. Storla, A. L. Cochran and C. C. Biddle — signed a stipulation before the Solicitor of the Post Office Department. They agreed to discontinue their activities and not to resume them.

This appeared to be a serious blow to Hartzell. Though the weekly remittance was still coming, the newspaper publicity resulting from the stipulation conceivably might lead

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the victims to take a good look into the rathole into which they were pouring their money. Hartzell tried to forestall this with another extravagant claim:

"As you know, I have never said very much about the amount, for to be perfectly candid with you, I don't think any of the people in America capable of grasping the magnitude of the whole affair. The way they have all done and treated me, they have made a very bad enemy of me, now I am going to give you a shock about the amount. Figuring all the land in the state of Iowa of an average rate of $125 an acre, and all the bank stock, and all the bank deposits in Iowa, and railroads and cities combined, I could buy the whole lot and put a fence around the whole state and then have more money left than you all ever thought of."

He could have saved himself the trouble.

The Post Office action, surprisingly, served only to stimulate the faithful. Hartzell's former predictions of stiff opposition were recalled and the Post Office Department's move seemed to bear them out. Cries of persecution spread through the membership.

In Iowa, which had been the first state organized and where the scheme was most firmly entrenched, Attorney General John Fletcher issued a statement calling the plan a racket and urging the people not to give any more money to it. As a result, he received thousands of letters charging that he was in the pay of the money lords who were trying to crush Hartzell and save the British financial structure.

The victims had sold themselves on the Utopian dreams of the Drake scheme and clung to their hopes, blind to all logical reasoning. They refused to listen to arguments — or even to facts — against Hartzell. With incomes insufficient to meet the payments, they squandered the family savings. And when these were gone, they dipped into the carefully hoarded tax money. They disregarded tax delinquency notices and thousands of them mortgaged their farms to buy additional shares.

The postal inspectors, alarmed at the tragedies that loomed in thousands of homes where foreclosures were imminent, stepped up their investigation. On January 10, 1933, a fraud order was issued against seven agents in Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota and Texas.

Hartzell countered with a demand that the order be resisted. He instructed his agents to send strong letters of protest to their congressmen, to the Solicitor of the Post Office, and the Attorney General of the United States. He threatened to red-ink any who failed to write.

It was apparent that Hartzell had acquired the role of a dictator, that he was beginning to regard himself as a great power.

The fraud order revived the publicity about the swindle. Newspaper

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reporters ferreted out amazing stories of the unshakable faith of the victims and these were given wide publicity.

The stories were then relayed to England, where the swindle was discussed in Parliament.

The collections began to drop. Not, however, because of any loss of faith in Hartzell, but because some of the agents were out of business and those remaining hadn't yet arranged to take over. Hartzell didn't propose to hold still for this. His growing power complex was evident in his next cablegram:

"I have the chain around the neck of every official on your side from the highest to the lowest that has crossed my path in this matter. Remember that the disturbance that the American people have made me has caused delay and a big loss to me. Parliament has nothing whatever to do with the date. I expect and must have $2,500 each week until I notify you of the finish. Please make up last week's shortage immediately."

The dupes took Hartzell at his word and continued to pay — literally through the nose. Hartzell harangued them with all sorts of alibis for the delay in settlement. The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Democratic landslide of 1932 was a serious setback, he told his followers. Roosevelt recognized the claim, he added, but was unwilling to upset the money structures of the world.

The British government, fully aware now of Hartzell's activities, was powerless to take criminal action without some evidence that he had violated a British law. A delegation of Scotland Yard detectives was sent to interview him.

He refused to give the name of the "sole surviving heir," or to tell the names of the lawyers who were supposedly helping in the negotiations.

"Where is this estate now?" he was asked.

"It's all over the place," Hartzell replied, waving his arms vaguely.

One of the detectives expressed doubt on that point.

"It's true nevertheless," Hartzell asserted. "I suppose you've been listening to stories from the United States."

The detective admitted that he had seen press reports from the United States, calling the estate promotion a swindle.

"My own people have treated me very badly," Hartzell declared. "They have caused me nothing but trouble."

"One thing rather puzzles us," a detective said. "We wonder why you, an American, are so interested in this estate."

"I'm practically British," Hartzell assured him. "Someone here in the home office has arranged all this, and when this is ended my name will suddenly become Drake and I will be a British subject."

After they had left Hartzell's

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quarters, one of the officers expressed what they all felt: "A trifle balmy, what?"

On the basis of the interview, the British were unable to place a definite charge against Hartzell. They did, however, have him declared an undesirable alien and he was deported to the United States in January, 1933, in the company of a United States vice consul.

The welcome mat was out for Hartzell when his ship docked in New York and a delegation of postal inspectors escorted him down the gangplank. He was taken to Sioux City, where his Iowa agents quickly arranged for his release on bail.

Almost immediately, a meeting of the victims was called and Hartzell appeared in person to talk to them. No longer a gawky hayseed, the swindler was now elegantly dressed in expensively tailored tweeds and spoke with a pseudo-British accent.

He told his followers what they wanted to hear: All arrangements had been made for the settlement in July. Meanwhile, he was a victim of government persecution and he needed funds to fight the absurd charges against him. Regardless of what happened, he told them, they must not lose faith in "our cause." They must not believe what they read in the newspapers. They must not believe anything except what Hartzell told them.

When Hartzell had appeared before them originally, they had trusted him because he was one of them, because he looked and acted like one of them. Now, he looked and acted like an affluent man of the world. They decided that's the way a man should be if he was to handle such a big deal. They trusted him again and when the hat was passed, came across to the tune of $68,000. Hartzell took the money and promptly departed for New York.

Meanwhile, inspectors had gone to England to gather evidence to be presented at the trial. The manager of the American Express Company in London told them that approximately $730,000 were transferred from New York to Hartzell between April 7, 1924, and January 30, 1933.

At Hartzell's apartment, the inspectors found his valet, W. J. Stewart, who had appropriated $1,900 sent to Hartzell after he was deported. He admitted that his former employer was a swindler.

The inspectors tried to find Hartzell's private papers and any incriminating evidence they might contain. But the papers had been impounded by a firm of London solicitors, who demanded a fancy price for them. The inspectors didn't have money for this purpose and didn't obtain the papers.

They did, however, locate a private detective who told them something of Hartzell's private life. Hartzell had visited a clairvoyant, Miss St. John Montague, who saw

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great possibilities in the affluent and naive American. She had an assistant, a buxom, dark-haired young woman who quickly caught Hartzell's eye. The clairvoyant told the girl to encourage the American to come back.

The two had hired the detective to learn all he could about Hartzell and report to the clairvoyant. The detective found out about the estate swindle and reported the details. These, in turn, were repeated to Hartzell, who was consistently blackmailed by the clairvoyant. The private detective, posing as an acquaintance, plied Hartzell with liquor and gained the confidential admission that the whole thing was a swindle.

Hartzell was infatuated with the assistant and called as often as three times a week. The clairvoyant amazed him by telling him details of the swindle — facts he thought nobody else knew — and clipped him every time she looked into her crystal ball.

Thus the man who was receiving money consistently from dupes in the United States was in turn swindled out of thousands of dollars by the English clairvoyant and her seductive assistant.

The inspectors found that Hartzell had philandered elsewhere. One English girl, whom he had repeatedly promised to marry, was the mother of his illegitimate son. Hartzell, after seducing her, had persuaded her father to invest $2,600 in the Drake scheme. Hartzell had encouraged the girl to rent an apartment and buy furniture, for which she went in debt. He kept putting off the marriage, but sent her three pounds a week after the child was born. On her father's death, he raised this to five pounds. He ignored the girl's pleas to pay the rent and help pay for the furniture.

The Postal Inspectors had amassed all the evidence they needed, and in November, 1933, the trial began in Sioux City.

With the help of the British authorities, the actual will of Sir Francis Drake, written on parchment and executed in August, 1595, had been dug up in the Historical Documents Room at Somerset House. The will had been legally probated and records of it and of the court proceedings had been photostated and certified by British officials. Because of Hartzell's frequent claim that the real skullduggery in the Drake case had occurred in the Ecclesiastical Court, a search of those ancient records had been made. The search uncovered a record of a contest between Drake's widow and his brother over disposition of some of the property in the will.

Charles Callen, an English lawyer, testified that even if the will had not been probated, the estate would have been irrevocably lost now, 337 years after Drake's death, because the English statutes of limi-

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tation on probate ran out after 30 years and no case could be reopened after that time.

Dr. C. Percy Powell, another British official, who had translated the will from Elizabethan English into modern language, testified as to the accuracy of the translation. He also confirmed the authenticity of the record of the Prerogative Court, where the will was probated, and of the Ecclesiastical Court where the will had been subsequently contested by Drake's widow and his brother.

Hartzell did not testify on his own behalf. But he was conscious that the courtroom was crowded with his followers and his demeanor was calculated to impress them. His attitude was that of a slightly bored spectator who was tolerating all this because it couldn't really touch him.

He showed little emotion when he was convicted by the jury of promoting a scheme to defraud and was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in Leavenworth. His lawyers appealed, and he was quickly released on bail. He left the courtroom wearing an air of martyrdom. This greatly cheered his indignant victims, who refused to believe the facts presented during the three-week trial and refused to accept the verdict.

The inspectors assumed that Hartzell's conviction, which had been widely publicized in the press and radio, meant an end to the fraud. They had no doubts that the higher courts would sustain the verdict and that Hartzell would soon be behind bars.

With several of his most faithful agents, Hartzell moved to Chicago, where the most astonishing phase of the entire swindle was started early in 1934. From headquarters set up in an office building near the Loop, Hartzell organized meetings of contributors throughout the middle west. Otto Yant was the principal speaker. He talked on international finance, the gold clique, and "the deal." The meetings were usually opened with prayer, a vow of undying devotion to the flag and allegiance to the constitution, and were closed with a plea to come across with more money.

Hartzell told his followers that his conviction was a frameup by the government, that he would be exonerated and that the day of settlement was near. Even after his last appeal had been denied and he was taken to Leavenworth early in 1935, he had each of his agents send out this message:

"I will say our deal is going fine. This last stunt of taking him away is all in the play. We have been advised all along that the outside world would think this is a fraud. If the papers came out and said the Drake estate thing was okay, we would be run to death by agents and grafters, and some of our heavy donors possibly would have trouble with kidnapers. This way no one

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will ever know we got the money. As to Hartzell he is not where the papers say, even though he left Chicago with officers. We know where he is and we know the reason."

When this was sent out, together with some rather flowery additions by one of the agents, Delmar C. Short, the money began to flow again in a steady stream. And the donators, now more hopeful than ever, kept the secret. So quietly did they conduct their business and remit their money, the post office inspectors were unaware that the swindle had started all over again.

It came to light when a Chicago man called at police headquarters. He said he had received a letter from his uncle in Wisconsin who wanted him to make sure that all the money he had remitted had been properly credited to him. The nephew recalled Hartzell's conviction and his subsequent trip to prison.

Detective James Zegar was assigned to the case. Posing as the nephew of the Wisconsin contributor, he called on Otto Yant, who referred him to Delmar Short. When he inquired of Short, he was shown a file of names of the Drake club members and was assured that his uncle's money was safe.

Short told him that the settlement had already been made, that the collection offices would be closed on April 8, 1935, and that payments to the contributors would begin that August. It was then April 7.

The following day, Zegar and other detectives raided the offices. They arrested Otto Yant, Delmar Short, Lester Kirkendall and Joseph Hauber. The files and records of 70,000 names were confiscated, along with $7500 just received that day. In various safety deposit boxes, the detectives found an additional $50,000.

Hauber tried a confidence game on the detectives. He said he was really a victim who had come to the Drake offices to investigate and was just on the point of going to the law. But the officers learned from others that he had been active in the swindle, attending the meetings and posing as a government official supervising the settlement, as a Scotland Yard detective or a Secret Service agent. The detectives listened to his story and ignored it.

The case again came into the hands of the post office inspectors, who estimated that the second phase of the swindle had netted about $500,000, including the money raised for Hartzell's defense.

The records seized in the raid were taken before the federal grand jury in Chicago. Hartzell and 41 other persons were indicted.

With names and addresses, the inspectors began questioning the victims. But none would admit ever having put money in the scheme to recover the Drake estate. A few said they had made some investments with Hartzell, but they reserved the

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right to do as they pleased with their money and they had no complaint.

Balked by the victims themselves, the inspectors decided to subpoena several of them in the hope that they would not perjure themselves in the witness stand.

All but seven of those indicted won dismissals. The evidence presented at the first trial had to be repeated. The victims who took the stand stood their ground. Their attitude was summed up by one man who said: "I say, with all due respect to the courts, that I haven't changed my mind. There were 70,000 in the deal and they have taken only one. From what I have heard the deal is still as strong as the Rock of Gibraltar."

On January 30, 1936, the jury returned a verdict of guilty against Oscar Hartzell, his brother, Canfield Hartzell, Lester Ohmart, Joseph Hauber, Otto Yant, Delmar Short, and Emil Rochel. All but Oscar Hartzell were sentenced to a year and a day in Leavenworth.

Oscar Hartzell, who had continued to display signs of delusions of grandeur, was returned to Leavenworth for psychopathic examination. In December, 1936, he was adjudged mentally incompetent and was sent to the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, Missouri. He remained a mental patient at that institution until his death on August 27, 1943.

The second trial and the imprisonment of the principal agents apparently put an end to the Drake swindle. But many midwesterners still hoard their receipts in the secret hope that some day the treasure ship of the famous buccaneer will come in.

And the post office inspectors send out periodic bulletins warning the public against investing in this and other estate schemes. The Drake swindle is dormant now, but the inspectors look for it to crop up again if times become lean.

Solution to Mystery Puzzle on page 96.

Luke said the low afternoon sun was in his eyes as he went from The Landing toward the Bay. This was impossible, since the Bay was eastward of The Landing. The Inspector theorized that if the sun really had been in Luke's eyes, he must have been coming from in the Bay toward the point. If he met Walters, who had told him to stay out of the Bay, there might well have been a fight that ended with Walters slipping and drowning. On the other hand, if Luke really had been coming from The Landing, the sun would not have been in his eyes, and his lying about that would indicate he had seen something he was reluctant to talk about — possibly Cora fighting with Walters. The first theory proved correct.

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Arthur Warren Waite was a young man from Michigan with a particular interest in gold. Natural, you'd say, in a dentist. Unfortunately, Waite was not satisfied with the small amounts of gold he encountered in his profession, and to acquire more, he embarked on an involved and unsavory scheme. The complications and denouement were so amazing, that Lawrence G. Blochman, well known book and magazine author, calls this his favorite murder case.

THE CASE OF THE GREEDY GROOM

by Lawrence G. Blochman

ONE BLUSTERY MARCH DAY IN 1916, a messenger arrived on the campus of the University of Michigan Medical School bearing a large wooden box which he refused to deliver to anyone except Dean Victor C. Vaughan in person. Dr. Vaughan found the box to contain several glass jars in which were a man's stomach, a large piece of liver, and portions of various other human organs. Dr. Vaughan immediately turned over the bits of detached anatomy to his two star graduate students in toxicology, and the tests they were to run determined the outcome of the strange case of Dr. Arthur Waite — my favorite murder case.

My personal interest in the Waite case is two-fold. First, one of the bright young medical students who analyzed the innards of Waite's victim is now a distinguished pathologist, Dr. William McKee Germain. Dr. Germain is an old friend of mine and is pretty much the prototype of Dr. Dan Coffee, the fictional detective who has been paying my grocery bills these last few years. Second, the Manhattan apartment house in which Dr. Waite carried on his macabre highjinks is just a few blocks up Riverside Drive from my own home. I have friends living there, and when I visit them, Tony the elevator operator still likes to talk about Dr. Waite.

Arthur Warren Waite was a good-looking young man from Michigan with an overweening love of money and a ruthless determination to get lots of it in a hurry. Skill and hard work had no place on his impatient

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timetable. Inheritance, with a little prodding, was a much easier and quicker way to his desired riches.

How an impatient and ambitious young man such as Waite ever considered becoming a dentist is one of the few still unsolved mysteries in the case. Yet he did get his D.D.S. degree from the University of Michigan, and in 1910 went to South Africa to work for a chain of dental offices run by two Michigan graduates who recruited their assistants from among the alumni at Ann Arbor. In 1914 Waite was back in Michigan with a bankroll of $20,000. (He had saved the money, he said; but there were stories much later about missing stocks of dental gold intended for inlays and bridges in Cape Town.) Waite also had a plan.

Essential to his plan was Clara Louise Peck, daughter of a millionaire drug manufacturer of Grand Rapids. While Clara Louise and Arthur Waite were still classmates at Grand Rapids High School, John E. Peck was already a wealthy man. By the time Waite returned from South Africa, the Peck fortune had multiplied many times. So Dr. Waite set out to win the hand of Clara Louise.

It was not a quick and easy courtship. The Peck family had been fighting off fortune-hunting suitors for so long that Clara Louise might have been looking ahead apprehensively to a rich but lonely spinsterhood. However, Dr. Waite seemed to be a personable young man. He was slim and handsome, and played a fast game of tennis. He had a charming British accent and urbane manners. He did not drink or smoke. He had some money of his own, and apparently Clara Louise wanted him.

His wooing lasted a year. He followed the family to Florida in the winter and returned with them to Michigan in the spring. He continued to be charming all summer, until the family relented. On Sept. 9, 1915, Clara Louise Peck became Mrs. Arthur Waite in one of the biggest weddings Grand Rapids had ever seen. The Reverend Alfred W. Wishart officiated.

After a short honeymoon the young couple moved to New York City, where they occupied a sumptuous apartment at 435 Riverside Drive. It was a glamorous address in those days, tenanted by famous people. The Great Florenz Ziegfeld lived there with his wife, Billie Burke. So did Francis X. Bushman, the silent-screen idol, and his two great Danes.

Dr. Waite did not immediately engage dental offices, as he was very busy, he said, as staff consultant in dental surgery at several hospitals. He had quite a few night calls, too. Busy as he was, however, he found time to win the Metropolitan Indoor Tennis Championship. And he was very attentive to his wife's Aunt Catherine who lived on Park Avenue.

Dr. Waite invited his in-laws to spend Christmas in New York with "the children." Mr. Peck was de-

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tained in Grand Rapids by business, but Mrs. Peck came for the holidays. After several gay weeks in the big city, she was suddenly taken ill. The physician who was called made a diagnosis of "kidney disease" and prescribed medicines. Dr. Waite spelled his wife at nursing Mrs. Peck, particularly at night, but Mrs. Peck got worse. On Jan. 30, 1916, she died.

Young Dr. Waite was a great comfort to his grieving wife. He made all arrangements for the return of the body to Grand Rapids. The Waites and Aunt Catherine Peck went along on the same train, and Dr. Waite, on arrival, took care of the necessary arrangements to have Mrs. Peck cremated. That was her wish, he said, just before she died.

The Reverend Wishart thought it odd that Mrs. Peck should have decided on cremation, as she had once told him she wanted to be buried in the family vault. The bereaved Mr. Peck, who was seventy-two and somewhat numbed by the shock of his wife's death, couldn't remember, but was willing to accept Dr. Waite's version of Mrs. Peck's wishes. Dr. Perry Schurtz, the family physician, didn't know about Mrs. Peck's wishes, but he could have sworn that her kidneys were as sound as a ten-year-old's when she left for New York; he wondered what she had been drinking in the eastern metropolis to corrode them so thoroughly and so quickly. Nevertheless, Mrs. Peck was cremated.

A few weeks after the Waites went back to New York, old John Peck followed. The great house in Grand Rapids had grown lonely. And he found it pleasant sitting in an easy chair by a window at 435 Riverside Drive, sipping his favorite whiskey while watching the sun set over the Hudson, knowing that his favorite dishes would be served at dinner. Mr. Peck loved to eat. In fact, he ate so much one night that he was stricken with acute indigestion. Again a doctor was called, but nothing seemed to relieve Mr. Peck's distress. On March 12, 1916, he died. "Acute indigestion, complicated by heart failure," was what the attending physician wrote on the death certificate.

Dr. Waite was busily arranging for the embalming and shipment of Mr. Peck's body to Michigan when two inopportune visitors arrived at the Riverside Drive apartment — a Dr. Jacob Cornell and his niece Elizabeth Hardwicke of Somerville, New Jersey, both relatives of Clara Louise Waite's. They had heard Uncle John was ill, and had come to see how he was.

The news that Uncle John had just passed away rendered Dr. Cornell speechless — but not Cousin Elizabeth Hardwicke. Cousin Elizabeth, who had always been considered a nosy busybody by Dr. Waite, his wife, and even Aunt Catherine, had no hesitation about speaking her mind, even in the house of mourning. She thought the haste with

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which Uncle John was being shipped home, almost before he was cold, was indecent, to say the least — and she said it. She also said she had never heard Uncle John complain of his heart, and she had never heard of the doctor the Waites had called in to attend Uncle John in his extremity. When, after several hours of alternate coaxing and snubs, Cousin Elizabeth was finally induced to leave the Riverside Drive apartment, she made her way to the nearest telegraph office.

Dr. and Mrs. Waite and Aunt Catherine left for Michigan that night, with Mr. Peck riding in the baggage car ahead. They were met at the Grand Rapids station by Clara Louise's brother, Percy Peck, the Reverend Wishart, and Dr. Schurtz. Again Dr. Waite declared that the deceased had expressed a wish to be cremated, but this time Percy Peck demurred. Shortly before the train arrived, the dead man's son had received a curious telegram from New York, urging that his father's body not be cremated without an autopsy. Although the name "K. Adams" signed to the telegram was unknown to young Peck, the text was enough to arouse his suspicions. After the Reverend Wishart had read the funeral service, he did not send the body to the crematorium. Instead he asked Dr. Schurtz to arrange a secret autopsy — without telling Dr. Waite.

The gross autopsy showed that old Mr. Peck's heart had been in perfect condition; but there were characteristic gastrointestinal lesions which prompted Dr. Schurtz to send the viscera to Dean Victor Vaughan at the University of Michigan for analysis.

It was at this point that my friend Bill Germain came into the picture. Dr. Vaughan was a man who had known Koch and Pasteur, and by inclination would have spent all his time in the laboratory. However, his administrative duties as Dean of the Medical School took too much of his time, so he turned over the work of actual analysis to his special toxicology students — Germain, a candidate for a master's degree in biochemistry; and Ned R. Smith, who later became a noted neuropsychiatrist.

A preliminary Reinsch test quickly established the presence of arsenic in Mr. Peck's viscera. However, the Marsh test, which was to determine if enough arsenic had been absorbed by the liver and other organs to cause death, was a more complex affair. The materials used had to be tested first — sulphuric acid, zinc, calcium chloride, even the distilled water — to make sure they were free of minute quantities of arsenic. Two batches of acid were discarded as impure. Samples of the embalming fluid used by the New York undertaker who shipped Mr. Peck's body had to be obtained and tested for possible arsenic content. Then the apparatus of beakers, flasks, and glass tubing was tested for two days

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to make sure it would produce arsenic "mirrors" inside the tube in exact proportion to the weight of the arsenic in the tissue. Finally the actual tests were begun — in triplicate, since a man's life depended on the accuracy of the outcome. Day after day, the exacting laboratory work went on. . . .

During this time, however, the forces of retribution were converging on Dr. Waite from other and unsuspected directions. Cast in the incongruous role of Nemesis was the Reverend Wishart, who had convinced Percy Peck that the real truth of his father's death could be learned only in New York. So the pastor of the Peck family church left for the big city and a few whirlwind weeks of sleuthing. As his only disguise, he wore a light gray fedora

The first thing the Reverend Wishart did on reaching New York was to hire a bright young private detective who had just left the William J. Burns agency to go into business for himself. The young operative's name was Raymond Schindler.

The second thing the clergyman did was to get in touch with Cousin Elizabeth Hardwicke, who admitted she had sent the telegram signed "K. Adams."

With leads furnished by Cousin Elizabeth, who had seen Dr. Waite in company of a strange blonde whom he had introduced as his nurse, Schindler soon had enough damning facts to interest the District Attorney's office in the case. Assistant District Attorney Francis X. Mausco assigned investigators to dig further. By this time the newspapers had got wind of something amiss, and a number of reporters joined the baying pack. When Dr. and Mrs. Waite returned to 435 Riverside Drive late in March, the investigators on Waite's trail — amateur and professional, public and private — were practically falling over one another.

The multiple investigations brought out the following facts:

That Dr. Waite had never taken the State Board examinations to practice dentistry in New York, and that he was not known at any of the hospitals to which he had claimed to be consultant in dental surgery.

That while Dr. Waite was supposed to be filling cavities, he was often closeted with a blonde singer named Margaret Horton, for whom he had taken a studio at the plushy Hotel Plaza under the name of Mrs. A. W. Walters of New Rochelle. Mrs. Horton insisted that she merely shared a common interest in art, music and foreign languages with Dr. Waite, whom she had met at the Berlitz School of Languages.

That on March 9 (several days before John Peck's death), Dr. Waite had asked Dr. Richard W. Muller, 10 E. 58th Street, for the name of a pharmacist who would sell him some arsenic to destroy a cat. Dr. Muller arranged for Timmerman's drug store at 802 Lexington Avenue to sell Waite 90 grams of white arsenic.

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That Dr. Waite had obtained from William Weber, an attendant at the Cornell Medical School, cultures of typhoid, diphtheria, pneumonia and influenza germs.

That Dr. Waite had gotten some $40,000 from Aunt Catherine Peck of Park Avenue, ostensibly for investments on the stock market, and that he had her power of attorney which gave him access to most of her liquid assets.

When Dr. Waite returned to New York with his wife, he was shadowed, but ostensibly unmolested for several days in the hope that if given enough rope he might tighten the noose about his own neck. He obliged with a vengeance. Obviously feeling the hot breath of the law on the back of his neck, Waite made a date with the undertaker who had prepared John Peck's body for shipment to Michigan, a man named Eugene Oliver Kane. He gave Mr. Kane $9000 to whip up a bottle of embalming fluid containing arsenic, to be sent to the District Attorney's office. Mr. Kane took the money but did nothing about the arsenic, because a New York State law prohibits the use of arsenic in embalming fluids. When the case broke, $7800 of the money Waite gave Mr. Kane was dug up from under a tree in Long Island, where the undertaker had buried it — either in panic or in the hope that his part in the matter would be overlooked.

And the case broke when the report came back from the University of Michigan toxicology lab. The tests established that John Peck had absorbed several times the three-grain dose of arsenic which is enough to kill a man. Dr. Waite was arrested for murder.

Waite's trial began in May, 1916, and his attorney, Walter R. Deuel, put the defendant on the stand. The dapper, debonair young dentist made a complete confession in the most fantastic detail.

He said he had killed for money. His plan was to inherit for himself Clara Louise's share of the Peck fortune. After Mr. and Mrs. Peck, he had intended doing away with his wife. Then he would go after Aunt Catherine, although the reason is not clear, since he already had his hands on most of her money. However, he declared he had already experimented on Aunt Catherine with ground glass in her marmalade, but the experiment had been unsuccessful.

Mrs. Peck had been easy to kill. He had first fed her some of his pneumonia, diphtheria, and influenza germs, and she had become ill almost immediately. When she took to bed, he helped prepare her medicine. An elixir made of twelve crushed veronal tablets finished her off quickly after she had been in bed for several days.

Old Mr. Peck was much tougher. He resisted typhoid, diphtheria, and influenza bacteria. Even tuberculosis cultures in his nasal spray took no effect. Finally Waite had to spike

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the old man's eggnog with arsenic. When Mr. Peck was stricken with excruciating gastric pains and asked for something to relieve his agony, Waite gave him a few whiffs of chloroform. The old man dropped off to sleep, and Waite put a pillow over his face so that he would inhale enough chloroform to die.

The defense apparently thought that a man who would calmly admit doing such horrible things would impress the jury as being insane. The jury, however, was not impressionable. It took just twenty minutes to reach a verdict of guilty.

During the next year, the case was carried all the way up to the Court of Appeals, and to a New York State lunacy commission — unsuccessfully. On May 24, 1917, Arthur Warren Waite died in the electric chair at Sing Sing. He was in his twenty-ninth year.

It was perhaps poetic justice that the wayward graduate of the University of Michigan should have been convicted on the basis of tests made by toxicologists at his own alma mater, even though his crimes were committed nearly a thousand miles away.

IT'S AGAINST THE LAW!*

State law makes it compulsory for the inmates of Michigan State Prison to pay for their own room and board.

No Michigan fruit peddler may coat his fruit with varnish to bring out their beauty.

In Michigan, a judge ruled that a woman's hair belonged to her husband.

Part of the public acts of Michigan for 1948, provides as follows: "Whenever . . . the first Monday in September, commonly called Labor Day; . . . shall fall upon Sunday, the next Monday following shall be deemed a public holiday.

In Detroit, it's unlawful for a shopkeeper to reach into the street and drag a passerby into his store.

There is an old law on Michigan statute books to the effect that a husband owns his wife's clothes and if she leaves his home, his privilege is to follow her on the street and remove every stitch of such clothing.

In Dearborn, it's the law that all policeman be at least six feet tall.

Public Highways in Michigan cannot be used for any other purposes than travel.

A State law forbids Justices of the Peace to hold court in a bar.

In Saginaw, you cannot show naked knees between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

DICK HYMAN

* *From the column in "The American Magazine"*

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Zany clients and zanier lawyers — they will always be with us. But to hear the gang from the Press Room tell it, their antics were far more exhilarating in the old days, when all lawyers were hams, and every trial promised to be a three-ring circus.

COURTROOM CAPERS

by Rod Van Every

THE PRESS ROOM OF THE BUILDING that houses Milwaukee's police headquarters and criminal courts contains two steel tables.

It is fortunate that they are steel. In their day they have withstood the iron tip of a window pole flung as a javelin; the crash of bottles and other missiles; the hammering of fists in the blackjack, gin, and poker games; the whacks of angry heels, sometimes heads.

On one table a lanky, bony figure reclines, his head pillowed on a city directory. The figure is a police reporter of long seniority. The steady yammer of the monitoring police radio disturbs it not; nor the insistence of the opposition newspaper's telephone. Two things will waken it: The fire department tape ticking off the bells of a box alarm; a report on how Charlie Swidler's murder trial is coming along.

Mr. Swidler's trial is coming along very well. His client is pretty, shapely, red haired and a divorcee. Who could ask for more? It is difficult for the jury to remember that her slim finger — index, right hand — recently curled around a trigger and squeezed. It is Mr. Swidler's job to make the jury forget.

The voices of Eddie, of the Milwaukee *Journal*, and The Judge, of the *Sentinel*, sound at the doorway of the press room. These are the voices the sleeping figure has been waiting for. It awakens, shifts its weight off the sharp right hip and onto the buttocks. Then in one easy half-roll, born of long practice, it swings into a sitting position on the steel table.

"Well, what happened?"

"You never saw anything like it, my friend. Looks like Charlie's got it right in the bag."

"So he's got it in the bag. Come on, what happened?"

"Well, friend, it goes like this. Charlie is making pretty good time with the jury with this business about it all being an accident. She is just handing the gun back to the boyfriend. Just giving it to him, see.

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And the damn thing goes off. They are the best of friends, he is not throwing her over, and so on, and so on."

"Never mind the God-damn 'and so ons'. What happened?"

"Well, Charlie's got to beat down the D.A.'s medical witnesses. They say the path of the bullet through Mr. Whatsis' body makes it look like it ain't an accident. Charlie insists the wound angle shows it was, and he will prove it.

"You know Charlie's voice. It starts rising, getting louder and louder. Just about the time it hits high C, the courtroom door opens and in walks one of Charlie's boys. He is pushing the God-damndest thing you ever saw.

"It's a skeleton, on wheels, all dressed up in a doctor's surgical gown. Damndest thing you ever saw. The skull sticks out of the top, the arm and hand bones dangle out the sleeves and the legs and feet out the bottom.

"The jury was like to fall out of its chair. It is a gruesome deal all right, and the D.A. starts hollering objections at the top of his voice. The judge is damn near as loud. He orders Charlie to get the thing the hell out of there.

"That is all right with Charlie. The jury has had a good look at the thing. And it also gets the idea that Charlie was going to prove something or the other with it and the state won't let him. He will make good time with that in his final sum-up to the jury. You can bet on that.

"Yes, sir, Charlie gave it to 'em real good." He won that case right there. [Ed. note: He did, too.] There ain't too many criminal lawyers like Charlie left. I wonder what's happened to 'em. Christ, nowadays it's like the lawyers and the D.A. have got a set of fair play rules.

"Why, I remember back in '24 . . ."

The boys of the press room had heard the story before, but they listened.

On December 8, 1924, Milwaukee suffered the ignominy of the first bank holdup in its staid, burgher history. The Northwestern National Bank was the victim. The haul, by six armed and very efficient men, was $300,000 in securities, mostly negotiable bonds, and $9,500 in cash.

In spite of six witnesses inside the bank and several more outside, the police turned up nothing but false leads for six months. Then they let things quiet down and waited for the bonds to turn up in the fences. They did, and John B. Davenport, of wide criminal experience, was arrested in Minneapolis.

Davenport dug in his heels and fought extradition, arraignment and preliminary hearing in a battle of habeas corpus and sundry other writs. In the end, however, he wound up before a jury in Milwaukee.

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Virtually the whole case of the district attorney rested on eye witnesses who had identified Davenport as the leader in the robbery. Davenport should have been an easy gentleman to identify. His head was as bald as a sugar bowl, on top of a cavernous face.

Attorneys William B. Rubin, of Milwaukee, and A. M. Carey, of Minneapolis, patterned the defense along three lines: Ridicule, alibi and mistaken identity.

Over the objections of the state, Rubin and Carey managed to wrangle Arthur P. Roberts onto the witness stand. Roberts was a clairvoyant medium and a very reluctant witness. More by innunendo than by testimony, the jury got the idea that Roberts had conducted a seance in the dignified board of directors room of the bank, all for the benefit of police and august bankers in an attempt to pinpoint the bank robbers. Roberts was extremely proud of the fact that he had put the finger on Minneapolis, where Davenport had been arrested. The police were not quite so proud.

By the time Rubin and Carey had finished with Roberts and his spooks, many of the jurors were smiling and there was outright laughter elsewhere. Like good dramatists, the attorneys played the witness for a full complement of laughs, then dropped him. Even the most unimaginative juror couldn't fail to see the humor of sedate bankers holding hands in a circle while the ghosts told Roberts where the bank robbers were hidden.

No less than six witnesses for the state identified Davenport as one of the bank robbers. The defense matched that with an array of witnesses and depositions which, with equal firmness, placed Davenport's innocent self in Minneapolis at the time of the crime.

Then Rubin and Carey sprang the clincher, mistaken identity. One by one they paraded to the witness stand three of the baldest men they could find. All bore a startling resemblance to Davenport. But these men were Col. Paul B. Clemens, assistant superintendent of Milwaukee public schools; Thomas E. Van Lear, former mayor of Minneapolis, and Howard Watson, another Milwaukeean.

The bald heads did it. The jury spent 40 minutes in the jury room, mostly at the task of selecting a foreman; then voted acquittal on the first ballot.

That story set the press room denizens to digging memories for other courtroom dramas that made criminal law history.

"I remember a murder case in Madison, Wisconsin, and the exhibit was a helluva lot more gruesome than Charlie's skeleton," said a rewrite man. "A couple of old men, friends, got into a drunken argument. One shot the other to death, straight through the heart. He claimed he did it in defense of his life, home and fireside, which was a shack at the county fairgrounds.

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"The dead guy's body was found 150 feet from the shack. The defendant claimed his pal had staggered that far after he'd shot him in the doorway. The district attorney's medical witnesses said it wasn't possible with bullet holes through both ventricles of the heart.

"To prove it, the D.A. fetched up a covered jar. It sloshed a little. I thought Darrell MacIntyre — he was the defense counsel — and the judge would go screaming straight out the ceiling. It was damn near a mistrial. In that jar the D.A. had the dead guy's heart.

"MacIntyre really won that case, though, with the sheriff, a nice little guy but a lousy witness.

"The state had one witness who had heard shots on the night of the killing. Gunshot tests by the sheriff and the D.A. proved, without a shred of doubt, that the witness could hear the death gun fired at the spot where the body was found but not at the shack's doorway. That strengthened the state's contention that the defendant had not shot his pal at the doorway in defense of his home but had followed him up a trail and had killed him with a shot in the back.

"MacIntyre undid those damning tests by the sheriff's own testimony. He flustered the poor guy and got him to describe how he had fired the test gun and what he'd aimed at. The sheriff said the ground was covered with snow and he imagined he was aiming at a ghost.

" 'Did you hit it?' MacIntyre asked.

" 'Yeah,' said the sheriff.

" 'Where?'

" 'Right smack in the heart.'

"That was it, brother. The jury guffawed, and MacIntyre had himself another acquittal."

The stories came faster, stories about such famed criminal lawyers as Bill Fallon, one of New York's most famous; the unscrupulous William F. Howe, of New York's Howe & Hummel firm; California's clever Earl Rogers; Norman Pruiett, of Indian Territory fame; Charlie Erbstein, of Chicago.

Someone brought up the ammonia-lime water case just concluded in circuit court at Green Bay, Wisconsin. In that, a woman was suing for injuries she claimed she suffered in eating ice cream garnished with ammonia. The defense attorney drank a glass of lime water to show that not all alkalis were harmful. The defense called a doctor. He ate ice cream topped with ammonia to prove its nontoxic qualities.

"Say, that reminds me of the poisoned cake case," said the old police reporter. "That's probably the most famous case on the books. Bill Fallon ate that cake and . . ."

"The hell he did," said the rewrite guy.

There was a chorus of objections. The vote was heavy for Fallon; a scattering for Rogers and Howe.

"None of them ate that cake," insisted the rewrite man. "God-

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dammit, I spent a week tracking down that one, and if it happened at all, it happened in London's old Bailey court. Personally, I don't think it ever happened."

Wherever criminals, criminal lawyers or crime reporters gather, the case of the poisoned cake is known.

The defendant was a woman accused of doing in her husband by feeding him cake loaded with arsenic. The state had a good case because the cake had been confiscated and analyzed. It contained enough poison to kill half a town. Since the state had the weight of evidence, things went very badly for the woman. Then, while a fascinated jury watched, the defense council tore off a chunk of the cake, jammed it in his mouth, chewed and swallowed it. The audacity of the act and the attorney's willingness to risk his own life for that of his client captivated the jurors.

There, however, is where the story swings into several versions.

One is that a messenger interrupted the attorney with the news that his mother was ill. The attorney asked the judge if he might be excused for a moment to write a letter to her. The judge agreed, and the attorney left the courtroom briefly. He hurried, of course, to a toilet, administered an emetic to himself and vomited the cake and poison.

Another version is that the lawyer timed his drama to coincide with court recess, then rushed off to a prearranged rendezvous with a stomach pump. A third contends that the attorney had built up an immunity to the arsenic by taking small doses daily for a month or so.

"Look," said the rewrite guy, "I went through half the public library hunting down that yarn, and I got it pinned on Sir William Grantham, a pretty famous old judge at Old Bailey, maybe 50 or 75 years ago. He didn't do it. He just told it.

"And that business about building up an immunity is a phony, too. Ask the medical examiner. Arsenic is a cumulative poison, and small doses could eventually kill you."

They seemed to run dry at that point. These old stories were great but they made you a little sad. True or false, they were part of a dying tradition. Eddie said it.

"It used to be a criminal lawyer would really put out for a defendant. Down on his knees. Tears on his cheeks. Screams, props, surprises. Damn it to hell, that's what he's getting paid for. If you're not an actor and got no flair for drama, you got no business playing around with another man's life."

Nobody argued with him. They'd picked up a deck of cards and settled back for a game of gin.

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Craig Rice, best known for such mystery fiction as her "Home Sweet Homicide," has also delved often into the realm of true crime. Here, in a tale possibly even stranger than many of her famous fictional stories, Miss Rice tells of a young prostitute whose determination to go straight led her, ironically, into a fiery death . . .

THE MURDERED MAGDALEN

by Craig Rice

BOOGIE-WOOGIE JAM SESSIONS IN A deserted farmhouse, murder by fire, and a manhunt that rivaled anything ever seen in a movie thriller, combined to provide the police of a dozen cities and the Federal Bureau of Investigation with a neat puzzle in crime detection back in the Fall of 1945.

Another person who will never forget this particular case is a farmer living near Danbury, Wisconsin. He was searching for a horse that had strayed into the woods when a car whizzed past on the lonely and little-used road. Wondering what such a sleek, obviously unfamiliar car was doing at this late hour of the night on a side road so remote from the main highway, he stepped out on the road to have a look. A shadowy figure emerged from the car, removed a large, limp burden from the back seat, threw it over his shoulder, and started toward an abandoned farmhouse off the road.

The little bit of amateur sleuth that lurks in every human heart awakened in the farmer's breast. In the faint light of the moon, he could see that the car was a Buick, 1941 or '42 model. Flashlight in hand, he stole up behind the house and listened. Inside somebody was tearing up the floor boards, and presently he could hear the sound of a spade digging up the earth. And then, another sound — the agonizing moan of a woman's voice!

The mental image of a fiend burying a woman alive shocked and startled him so that he moved — and the aged boards of the fuel box on which he was crouching creaked. A voice from within the house cried out: "Who's there?" A man's voice.

Armed with nothing but his flashlight, the farmer fled into the woods. A shot rang out, and then another. That second bullet had struck home — he felt the impact of it, but he didn't know where it had hit and

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he felt no pain. He dropped to the ground and hid himself in the underbrush. The beam of the pursuer's flashlight swept over him. He held his breath. After an interval that seemed like ages, the pursuing footsteps diminished in the direction of the abandoned farmhouse. The farmer looked up and saw flames bursting from the windows. The woman! The fiend was making the house her funeral pyre.

By the light of the fire, he could see the man now. He was short and slim, and he was making his way back to the Buick. A moment later the car was racing away from the scene of the crime. Forgetting his own wound, the farmer ran toward the house, intent on saving the woman inside, but it was too late. The old shack was one sheet of lurid flame. He tried to turn the flashlight on himself to see where he had been hit. It failed to work. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the bullet had hit the flashlight and lodged in one of the batteries. By the narrow margin of inches the killer had failed to commit a double murder that night.

The fire was still smoldering when the sheriff of Burnett County arrived at the scene. While he waited for the ashes to cool, he and his deputy questioned farmers within a radius of several miles. Cruising police cars, alerted for the search, spread a net for the fugitive Buick. No results.

The charred embers yielded a scorched gasoline can which established the incendiary origin of the fire. The corpse was burned beyond recognition, but the coroner was able to determine that the girl was young, about five-feet-four in height, and black-haired. That she wore expensive clothes was evident from the few patches of material that remained — a bit of blue gabardine, a shred of tan skirt and a fragment of the pink slip. An autopsy performed that afternoon revealed that the victim had been shot in the head but was still alive when she was consigned to the flames. Only one finger was sufficiently intact to yield a print, but there were gold fillings in several teeth, and these might prove important later if the dentist who did the work could be located.

Certain things could be safely deduced from the evidence in hand. Neither the killer nor his victim were local people, but the murderer must have been familiar with the neighborhood or he would not have known about the abandoned house or been able to find it in the dark. The house had not been occupied in years. Was the suspect a former resident of the place, perhaps?

And why did he go to such pains to destroy the body and make identification difficult? Was it because he was so intimately connected with the victim that mere identification of the corpse would be enough to implicate him?

The combined efforts of the police of several states failed to provide

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immediate answers to any of these questions, but farmers in the vicinity of the abandoned house came forward with information that was both unexpected and startling. For some time back, they said, they had been hearing one goshawful racket coming from that house at intervals, and always late at night.

"The joint was jumpin' with jive addicts," was the way one of the policemen reported his findings.

It seemed that some musicians from nearby Superior, Wisconsin, and Duluth, Minnesota, had spotted the abandoned house and met there to hold jam sessions. From time to time they had filled the night with music and, at dawn, they had silently stolen away, like the Arabs.

Well, at least somebody besides the vanished phantom of the farmer's story had been placed at the scene of the crime. Perhaps the jive artists could be traced through the musicians' union headquarters in Duluth and Superior. If the gun-wielding firebug could be identified as a musician it would at least answer the question: How did he know about the abandoned farmhouse? Except for the report of a stolen Buick at Richland Center, 250 miles from the scene of the crime, there had been nothing on the get-away car. Missing persons bureaus had been unable to offer any help. The identity of the victim was still as deep a mystery as ever, in spite of one partial identification that turned out to be a mistake.

When the owner of the farmhouse and all former tenants had been investigated and cleared, there remained only two leads of any importance: the stolen Buick and the jam session musicians. The Buick was found in St. Paul. It bore a stolen license plate, and in back of the car was a bloodstained blanket. Steps were taken at once to compare the bloodstains with samples of the victim's blood. As for the jivemen, the musicians' union was able to supply the names of members who had been making the farmhouse the "jumpin' joint" reported by neighboring farmers.

Altogether there were five in number. Four of them, police learned, were playing a dance date on the night of the crime, so they had an alibi. The fifth, let's call him Jimmie Gates, claimed he had spent the night in Duluth taverns, but he couldn't find anybody to back up his alibi. Gates was a hot suspect, but unless something could be found to link him directly with the crime Duluth police would be compelled by law to release him from custody within twenty-four hours. It was little enough time in which to break the case, but the situation was saved — by a finger.

Fingerprint identification has become so swift and efficient during the last ten or fifteen years that everybody takes it for granted. Few people realize how much skill it still requires — raising the dim traces of

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a print, reconstructing the imperfect ones, a job that is often almost as complicated as reconstructing a prehistoric animal from the fossil remains of a few scattered bones. Even when you have most of the fingerprints of one hand, and you rarely have all of them, it still requires great skill to make a positive identification. In this case the technicians of the Minnesota Crime Bureau had only one print of the right index finger to work on, and they made it. My best hat — the one with the skull and crossbones rampant on a field of poison ivy — is off to the Minnesota Crime Bureau for identifying the body of Lorraine Edin of Minneapolis on the strength of one fingerprint.

Lorraine Edin. The name was a new one to the police of Burnett County, but the Minneapolis police records showed that Lorraine had served a 30-day sentence for vagrancy in 1944. Members of her family there said that on October 25, 1945, the day before the fire-slaying in the abandoned farmhouse, Lorraine had gone to visit a girl friend in Duluth.

Duluth. That was the place where police were holding Jimmie Gates, the swing musician who was having trouble making good his alibi. Lorraine's girl friend was located at a restaurant where she worked in Duluth. There police interviewed her and learned that Lorraine had been planning to marry a man by the name of George Moffit, but at 7 o'clock on the night of Oct. 26 — the night of the crime — she phoned her girl friend in tears, saying she and George had quarreled and she was checking out of the Duluth hotel where she had been staying. Why had they quarreled? Well, George might have found out at the last minute that his bride-to-be had been arrested several times as the inmate of a disorderly house. She had kept that a secret from George, meaning to settle down after they were married —

No, the girl friend never heard of Jimmie Gates, and she was sure Lorraine never knew anybody by that name. Police then proceeded to question clerks and bellhops at the hotel where Lorraine had been staying, but all they could learn was that Lorraine Edin had checked out at 7:45 P.M. without leaving any forwarding address.

Once more police questioned Jimmie Gates, again without success, and a call was put out for George Moffit, the man Lorraine had hoped to marry. Meanwhile the stolen car in St. Paul had been checked and the facts about it failed to fit into the case. Besides, the blood on the blanket failed to match the victim's.

But investigation of Lorraine Edin's background had added still another name to the list of suspects, that of James Tyler. Tyler, it seemed, had been the evil influence in Lorraine's life. It was he who drew her back into the underworld of vice every time she tried to break away

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from it. She must have been sincere in her desire to lead a decent life, for at last she went to the FBI in Minneapolis and reported James Tyler.

To a rat like Tyler that would be a "double-cross," and if he had found out about it — the police would have to look no farther for the motive, or the man. The call went out far and wide: Find James Tyler and bring him in!

While the hunt for Tyler went on police questioned George Moffit. He admitted having quarreled with Lorraine but apparently he still knew nothing of her past. It was just that she had some silly notion about moving far away from Duluth after they were married, and he couldn't understand why. Apparently the poor girl was trying to escape from the evil influence (or the death threats) of James Tyler, without letting George know the reason why.

The police knew now that Tyler was their man. He was known to have owned a 1941 Buick sedan. He was a boogie-woogie addict and he had taken part now and then in the jam sessions at the deserted farmhouse. The man-hunt was on, and it led from Minneapolis to Des Moines and from there to Kansas City. It was November 19th before Tyler was cornered in Chicago.

His story, when he finally confessed to the sheriff of Burnett County, was that after Lorraine Edin quarreled with George Moffit, he, Tyler, picked her up and offered to drive her back to Minneapolis. On the way she told him that she had reported him to the FBI. That did it. From that moment he determined to kill her.

"Her death was the result of a set of circumstances I couldn't control," Tyler told police. "I had a can of gasoline in the car, and after I shot her I took her to the abandoned farmhouse and set the place on fire."

It's rare to find a case of such ironic justice. The victim herself put the finger on her murderer — under circumstances she couldn't control.

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A PACKAGE FOR THE PRESIDENT

THE PROFESSIONAL THIEF OR "CONfidence man," so popular now in books, magazines and on major television programs, belongs to a society of the most skilled criminals in the world. His is a specialized field, for he must use his wits and his wits alone to part his victims from their money and valuables. He uses no force, no firearms. The "con" man's only weapons are a suave manner and a reassuringly glib tongue.

One of the smoothest heists on record is one in which one of the best "grifters" in the game robbed a jewelry store of a precious item of jewelry in broad daylight. And more interesting is the fact that the President of the United States helped him do the job. It happened like this:

The "con," impeccably dressed and employing his most suave, diplomatic manner, entered a fashionable Washington jewelry store, which, of course, he had been casing for a few days. Presenting fake credentials, he told the clerk that he was a representative of the U. S. State Department and asked to see a gift suitable for President Franklin D. Roosevelt to bestow upon a visiting dignitary. Quite naturally, the clerk brought out the store's most expensive merchandise.

The man kept hemming and hawing until the clerk had brought out all the suitable items he had on hand. Picking the most valuable bauble on display, the "con" asked that the gift be sent to the President's Hyde Park home, in this way dispelling any doubts that might have lurked in the salesman's mind. He picked the Hyde Park address mainly because he did not especially care to run the gauntlet of guards stationed at the White House.

Upon leaving the store, the "con" man proceeded to the President's home and hung around, waiting for the package to be delivered. When he finally saw the messenger arrive and deliver the package to the butler, he high-tailed it to a nearby drugstore, popping immediately into a phone booth.

"This is Brown and Sons, jewelers," he said suavely, when the President's home answered. "Did you just receive a package from our shop? You did? It was a mistake. The merchandise was meant for a different customer. A blundering mistake on my part. I addressed the packages incorrectly. Please forgive me. We will send a messenger to pick up the package. Sorry to have caused any trouble."

Whereupon the "con" hurried into the men's room to change into a reasonable facsimile of the messenger's uniform. Half an hour later, he leisurely strolled back to the President's home, gave a false receipt for the package and departed, never to be seen again.

—THOMAS P. RAMIREZ

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—Continued from Back Cover

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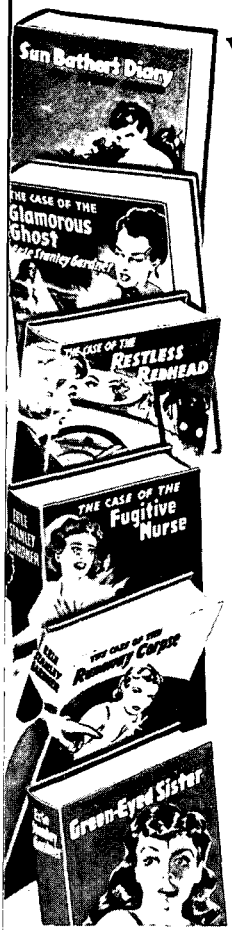
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Perry's client doesn't remember what happened the night her husband was murdered. She can't recognize her own .38—the murder weapon. Only two people can clear her. One is missing—the other is *dead!*

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Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Then a blonde *slams the safe shut.* Not sinister . . . *except* that the *tenant* had been MURDERED!

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A client hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband. Perry finds *blank* paper! Police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

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